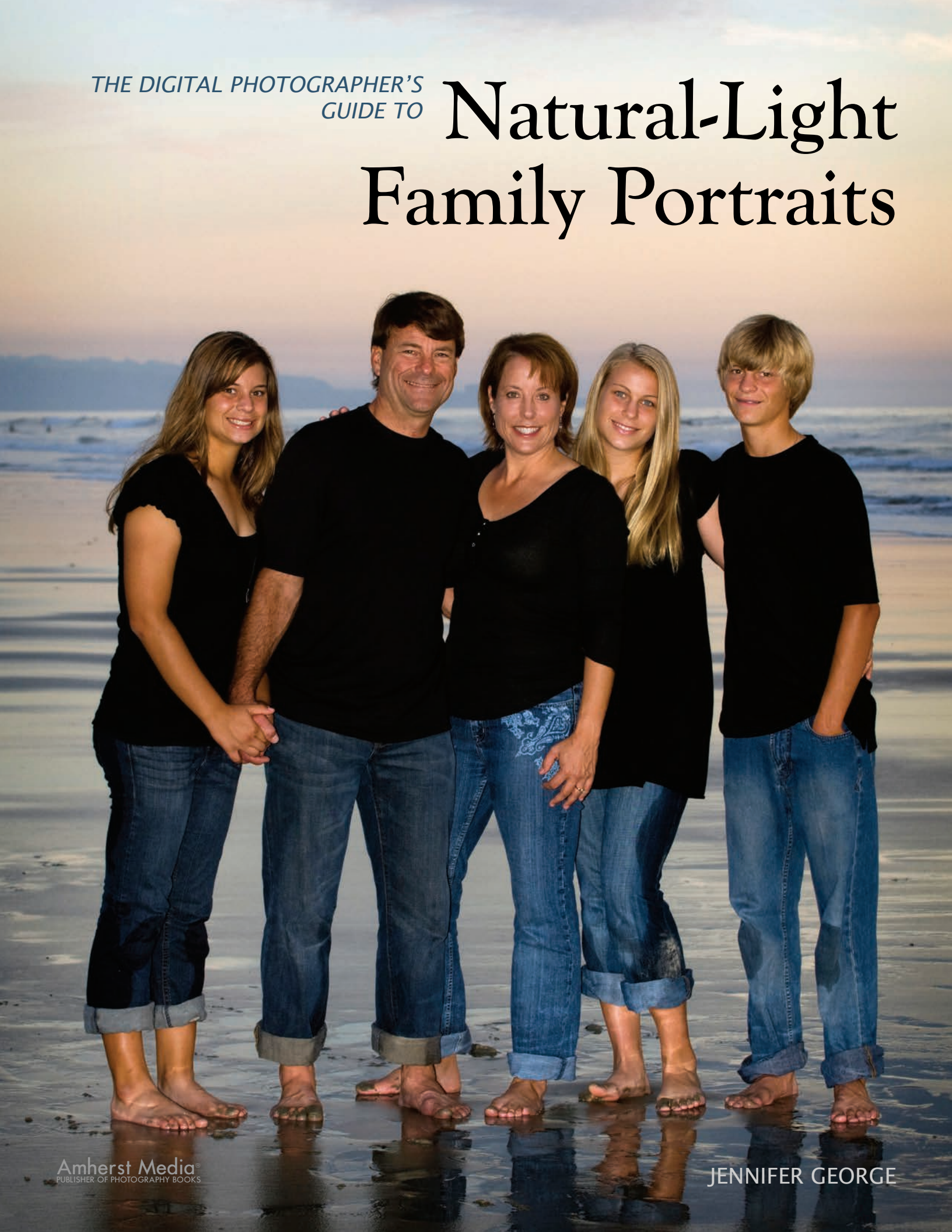
THE DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHER'S GUIDE TO

Natural-Light Family Portraits



Amherst Media®
PUBLISHER OF PHOTOGRAPHY BOOKS

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Published by:
Amherst Media, Inc.
P.O. Box 586
Buffalo, N.Y. 14226
Fax: 716-874-4508
www.AmherstMedia.com

Publisher: Craig Alesse
Senior Editor/Production Manager: Michelle Perkins
Assistant Editor: Barbara A. Lynch-Johnt
Editorial assistance provided by Sally Jarzab and John S. Loder

ISBN-13: 978-1-60895-286-1
Library of Congress Control Number: 2010940508
Printed in Korea.
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am so grateful to so many for their assistance in my authoring of my second book, *The Digital Photographer's Guide to Natural-Light Family Portraits.*

My children's patience and support has been essential to this accomplishment. The technical help of my summer interns Mariam Safar and Colleen Langill and editorial review from Marilyn Adams George is so appreciated.

I am thankful for the wonderful advice, input, and support of so many outstanding and accomplished photographers with whom I have become both a professional colleague and personal friend as I gathered information and ideas for this book. A very special thanks goes to all the clients who posed for the photos that appear in these pages. Additional thanks go out to all of the wonderful parents of the special needs children whose images appear in this book for their assistance in helping me to become better at serving that specific population.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer George has gained a national reputation for her intimate, stylistic portraits. Her subjects are not just clients; rather, her portraits seem to reveal the inner essence of the person. Her soulful images, use of natural lighting, and multicultural awareness have afforded her the ability to follow her dream. The awards she has earned in just a few years include:

- California Photographer of the Year, 2001—Professional Photographers of California
- People's Choice Award, 2001 and 2004—Professional Photographers of California
- Grand Premiere Award, 2003—Wedding and Portrait Photographers International
- First Place Award, 2003—Wedding and Portrait Photographers International
- California Family Photographer of the Year, 2004—Professional Photographers of California
- Photographer of the Year, Gold level, 2005—Professional Photographers of America
- Portrait Photographer of the Year, 2009—Professional Photographers of San Diego County

Jennifer is passionate about inspiring other photographers to discover their own creative style. After being named California Photographer of the Year, she was able to travel the state, sharing her distinctive approach to portraiture. Jennifer taught at the PPA Women in Photography Convention in 2004 and spoke at WPPI for three years. Jennifer also travels and teaches internationally, having done work in Asia and East Africa. She continues to guest lecture at colleges, universities, photography affiliate organizations, and workshops in the United States and abroad. She teaches out of a desire to impart creativity to aspiring photographers, to push their photography to new levels.

Excelling in her craft, Jennifer has completed the print and educational merits needed to earn her Masters from Professional Photographers of America in only three years. As a Certified Professional Photographer, she has obtained her Craftsman degree from PPA. In addition, seven of her works have been selected for the National Exhibition for PPA, and two additional prints were selected for the PPA display in Seoul, Korea, 2005.

Jennifer has also been featured in popular photographic magazines, including *Professional Photographer* (July 2004), *Rangefinder* (July 2003), and *Shutterbug* (November 2005). Her commercial work has appeared in several magazines including *Forbes, Ranch & Coast,* and *American Photo* (Nik Software). She has also contributed images and insights to several Amherst Media books, including *The Portrait Photographer's Guide to Posing, Portrait Photographer's Handbook, Rangefinder's Professional Photography,* and *The Best of Family Portrait Photography,* all by Bill Hurter. More recently, Jennifer's images were featured in Amherst Media's *Digital Photography for Children's and Family Portraiture,* by Kathleen Hawkins. Jennifer's first authored book, *The Art of Pregnancy Photography* (Amherst Media 2008), is available for purchase worldwide.

In an interview for *The Portrait Photographer's Guide to Posing,* Jennifer said of her own style, "I push myself creatively in order to offer things to my clients that they have never seen before." She believes that the artistic creation of visual imagery allows the photographer to touch the emotion and soul of her client.

1. THE SESSION EXPERIENCE

Facing page—By cultivating a trusting relationship with your subjects, you can allow them to relax and, in turn, capture images that show them enjoying themselves. **Below**—This beach-side family portrait capitalizes on the warm tones from the setting sun. Greater depth of field gives this image crisp detail and definition. The family's bright smiles—and the fill flash—created additional warmth in the image. The exposure for this image was f/9 at $\frac{1}{250}$ and ISO 400. I used a 70–200mm f/2.8 lens, set to 70mm.

While most photographers believe that technical expertise and artistic ability are the keys to creating a portrait, when it comes to photographing families today, it is the photographer–client connection and the comfort of the client that are critical to producing an outstanding image.

In the past, photography was a technically demanding career, and it was assumed that the client's experience during the session would be driven by the technical aspects and training of the photographer. Today, the digital age of photography has made the craft more accessible to the general public. The sophistication of today's digital cameras makes it possible for anyone to pick up a camera and, within minutes, take an image that is correctly exposed. In the past, it took a professional with specialized train-

The relaxed poses of these subjects created a sense of authenticity in this photograph. The natural glow from the evening sun softened the subjects' faces. The common theme of the blue jeans and the black shirts created a sense of harmony in the image.

ing to even expose an image correctly. With the proliferation of digital cameras, professional family portrait photographers may find themselves struggling to ensure a successful business in a changing market. What will help? Having a service unlike any others and providing an unforgettable experience for the family will allow the professional portrait photographer to stand out from the competition.

IT'S THE EXPERIENCE THEY ARE BUYING, NOT THE IMAGE

The digital revolution has inspired countless people to take up photography. In this highly competitive market, you'll need to ensure that you are doing all you can to stay in business and make a profit. High-end portrait photographers have realized that it is the portrait experience people buy, not necessarily the images. From the moment they have contact with you to the moment they leave your studio, you should present your clients with a rewarding, positive, and memorable experience. One of the easiest ways to increase your sales is to do more than capture the family appearing relaxed and happy. You must also document the touching moments between and with them. Building positive rapport from the start will help you to create images with meaning, allowing you to capture memories

The simple posing used in this portrait allowed for a natural feel. The linking of arms and hands is a classic way of showing togetherness.

Soft side lighting created a warm glow on the young girls' adorable faces. The close cropping helped to create an image with a great deal of impact. I used a Nikon D2X to capture the shot. The exposure was f/2.8 at $^{1}/_{125}$ and ISO 400. I used a 28–75mm f/8 lens set to 44mm.

for the family and produce heirloom portraits that will be cherished by generations to come.

GREETING THE CLIENT

When it comes to connecting with your client and building trust, you have precious few moments to make that first impression. A key to a successful portrait session is to create a positive experience from the moment you meet your client. You must stay on top of your daily schedule, anticipate the arrival of your clients for their session, and prepare yourself for a positive greeting.

No matter how stressful your day might be, your clients require your complete attention and a positive attitude. Have a policy for when clients arrive. Always be on time and ready. Have the studio or office prepared, make sure your equipment is ready to go, put a smile on, take a deep breath, and prepare for a positive exchange between you and your client. In the book *How to Make People Like You in 90 Seconds or Less* (Workman Publishing Company 2000), Nicholas Boothman notes that practicing the greeting moments before the exchange will increase the likelihood of

it being successful. Starting off on a positive note will set the course for the entire session.

Also, having a positive attitude while out in public will draw new clients to you and allow you to make a positive first impression. You never know who you will bump into on your daily errands—you may meet up with the best client of your career. Therefore, it is important to have a professional appearance at all times.

THE CONSULTATION

The consultation is imperative to the success of your session. There are several questions to ask your clients—whether on the phone or in person—that will help you to map the session. It may be beneficial to create a list of questions you want to ask every time you consult with a client. Keeping the list close by will allow you to stay on track and remember the key questions. Many portrait studios use a form the client fills out during or before the session for the photographer to review.

You will want to ask what the client's goals are and determine what experiences they've had in the past. Find out when the client's family's portrait was last taken, and ask what the experience was like. What was their favorite image from the session? What would they like to do differently this time? Find out the ages of the children and ask about each child's personality type. Find out how they feel about having their portrait

Left—Getting this shot from a high angle created a great composition of slanted angles, bringing character and creativity into the photograph. **Right**—Great composition goes a long way toward producing an image with impact. Capturing emotion in the image only made it better. This image was shot at ISO 400, at an aperture of f/6.3 and a shutter speed of 1/160.

Top—Color-coordinated clothes unified this large group. The horizontal line of the ocean contrasted with the strong vertical lines of the family members. This image was taken with a Nikon D2X. The exposure was 1/50 second at f/5.6 and ISO 400. **Bottom**—Flash fill illuminated the faces of this couple, while the setting sun created a warm backlight. The combination of these two elements, along with placing the couple to the right side of the frame, created a gorgeous image. This image was taken with a Nikon D2X. The exposure was f/5 at 1/160 and ISO 200. I used a 28–75mm f/2.8 lens set to 75mm. **Facing page**—One advantage to location settings is the ability for you to capture spontaneous moments. Families can relax and play at a location setting. Here, the mother was keeping her baby busy and happily playing. This moment was captured with a Nikon D2X. The focal length on the lens was 105mm. The exposure was f/5.6 at 1/200 and ISO 400.

done. Asking questions is critical to understanding how you can meet your clients' needs and have a successful session. As you talk to the client, establish the goals you want to achieve and explain how the session will be conducted. A client who understands the process can more easily work with you to achieve the desired outcome than one who does not.

If you are photographing young children or babies, try to schedule an early appointment, as these young ones will be happier and calmer early in the day. If they are tired or hungry, they will be difficult to work with. Your best bet is to schedule a pre-lunchtime session.

Studio or Location? During the consultation you will also want to determine the best location for the session. Will the session work best in the studio, or will a location shoot be a better idea?

Facing page—Here, the placement of the girls' hands and the pair's gentle expressions captivate one's emotions. The softness of the light on their skin tones and the catchlights in their eyes bring you into the photograph. **Above**—This photograph really captures the bond between brother and sister. Gorgeous window lighting beams off their faces, and that little sparkle in their eyes draws you in. This streamlined backdrop enhanced the warmth in the image without detracting attention from the playful siblings. I used a Nikon D2X with an 18–200mm lens set to 38mm to capture the shot. The exposure was f/4.5 at 1/50 and ISO 400.

When photographing families, the location of the shoot may be dictated by the size of the group. Most standard studio setups have a background that is 9 feet wide. A background this size will allow you to comfortably photograph a group of up to five or six people, but if you plan to do multiple poses or more creative posing, the standard background may be extremely limiting for a family this size (especially if the children are older). With a larger group, you may want to consider shooting in the client's home. The family will be more comfortable in their own environment, and they won't have to travel to you. Also, they will have the ability to change clothing if needed. Outdoor locations, such as a beach or park, are also popular (for more on this topic, see chapter 5). For you, conducting a location session will require more work. You will want to conduct the consultation at the photo location to scout for the best shooting areas. You will also need to arrive early to set up your studio lights.

Style of Portrait. The consultation allows the photographer to find out exactly what the client is looking for. Photographers who have a distinct brand and style of photography may simply want to find out what type of image was made before and capture a similar type of image, in their own style.

Top—With only the subjects in focus, the family really stands out. Balance is a key element to implement in your photographs. As exemplified here, balance is created by the position of the subjects within the frame. The image was made with a Nikon D2X. The exposure was f/5.6 at 1/250 and ISO 500. The focal length was 122mm. **Bottom**—Here we see different shapes within the photograph, which were created by the various poses used. Using different poses for each of the clients also added interest in the overall image. The vignetting created a light border that draws the eye to the group.

Portrait photographers with a well-established style will ask questions about who will be in the image, why the family wants their portrait taken at this time, and how their portrait style will suit the dynamics of the family. Well-known, high-end traditional portrait artist Tim Kelly (www.timkellyportraits.com) creates images that are timeless and classic. His branding, marketing, web site, and public image all contribute to his established style and brand. Tim and Beverly Walden (www.waldensphotography.com) have established themselves as high-end portrait artists with a twist. They started defining their business by creating beautiful black & white images for families and called this relationship portraiture. Their images

captured parents and children with beautiful lighting in simple, solid-black clothing. As they developed this style, they added rich color portraiture and then painted portraits. Before a new client calls these photographers, they have a good idea of what type of photography they offer.

If you are a newer photographer or a generalist, finding out what the client desires for the family portrait will be important. You will want to ask questions like, "Do you want a traditional pose or more contemporary, relaxed style?" and "Would you like me to capture the relationship dynamics of your family or the emotions between the family members?"

"Having our pictures done with Jennifer was fun and easy. We felt relaxed and at ease. The kids were beaming because she made them feel like a million bucks."

—Angie G.

SCRIPTING THE SESSION

By creating images of subgroupings of the family members, you will have many different images to sell. Start with the critical image first. For the family, this will most likely be the portrait of all of the family members together. Once you have that finished, ask either the parents or the children to step away and take several images of the smaller grouping. (*Note:* Later in the chapter we will look at posing strategies for each grouping.) As you move on to work with each smaller grouping, think about the relationships between the individuals. Dads and daughters have a different relationship than fathers and sons. Be observant from the start of the session and note the connections between each of the family members. Be sure that each child is photographed alone with each parent. Finally, capture the group of kids alone with each parent. These portraits will make good gifts for the parents to give to each other or to the children's grandparents.

At each developmental stage, from active toddler to distant teenager, that relationship the child has with his or her parents is special. Don't let teen rebellion prevent you from capturing a mother and 14-year-old daughter together, because one day they will be best friends. For many families, this session could be one of the only times they are all together at one place. And it may have been a long time since they hugged, touched, or even spent time together. Stay positive and make positive comments about how great the subjects look and how well they follow directions. Also, lightly joking and being playful will break down barriers and shyness. If your clients are comfortable with you, they will be more likely to let you suggest and record touching, emotive portraits of them together.

CREATING TOUCHING MOMENTS

When working with a family with a young child, have one parent posed sitting alone, and then have one child sit with that parent. Start with simply seating the subjects close together, then have them wrap their arms around each other or have the child hug the parent around the shoulders while looking at the camera. When the child is in position, ask the parent

Facing page and right—Some moments happen by accident. In both the photos, the moment was not planned but captured during an unstructured session time. As the children were moving off to the next location for a family portrait, I captured this storytelling moment. For the client, this was a key image of their twins interacting naturally. The photo on the right was captured while the three teen siblings were just being themselves and playing with their dog. Though the image was not preplanned, it turned out to be one of the family's favorites from the session. Keep your camera at the ready so that when these precious, unexpected moments play out, you're able to document them.

to kiss the child on the cheek or simply "snuggle" in close while closing their eyes. Also have the child climb onto the parent's lap, ask the parent to wrap their arms around the child, and have the child rest their head on the parent's chest. When doing this pose, ask the child to close their eyes for some of the images, then ask the parent to close their eyes. Prompt the desired expression by telling the child to pretend they are a baby and their mom or dad is putting them to bed. While they are this close, photograph the child's small hand inside the parent's hand. Repeat this process with the other young children.

For older children, start with the parent and child sitting next to one another, then have the older child put their arms around the parent's shoulders. Older children will be comfortable joking and playing with the parent, especially dads.

Don't forget to photograph the parents as a couple. Many married couples with kids have not have had a portrait taken since their wedding. Photograph them in traditional poses, then break away and photograph them looking off into the future, showing their profiles. You should also capture images of their hands and wedding rings or of the couple walking together.

Creating touching images on location is just as easy as creating them in the studio. Working on location, you have an advantage: you can select scenes that help to add to the mood or storytelling aspect of the image. Look around for places to capture the emotional connections between the family members. At the beach, an image of a mom and dad walking down the shoreline together speaks volumes about their love and commitment to one another. A dad and son throwing rocks in the pond at the park demonstrate their playful relationship. A mom and daughter sitting close on a park bench and talking shows their close bond.

2. RELATING TO THE CLIENT

BASIC STRATEGIES FOR CREATING PORTRAITS

There are many elements that go into creating a portrait. Not only does a portrait photographer need advanced technical knowledge pertaining to everything from proper exposure to digital retouching, but they must also be able to relate to and connect with the subject. Once you have set the mood of the session with your positive greeting, you are ready to direct the client into pleasing and flattering poses that match the emotion of the image.

DIRECTING THE CLIENT'S POSE

Directing the client is a skill in and of itself. Your goal in creating a portrait is not only to capture what the subject looks like but to capture their likeness in a flattering manner. To create an enhanced portrait, you can also elicit emotion from the client, creating an interesting and intriguing portrait.

How do you direct your clients? By talking with them to notice their natural body movements and positions and showing them how to refine their position for the most flattering results.

Directing subjects in a portrait is much like directing actors in a movie. To start the session, it usually helps to show the main subject—usually a

Left—This image shows the photographer explaining the pose and portrait concept to the client. Making the clients comfortable and relaxed and helping them with posing will go a long way toward creating beautiful family portraits. **Right**—The final pose.

Top—Clients do well with lots of feedback. Being friendly and open and sharing with them will help them relax and will set a positive tone for the session. When creating a casual portrait of a family with older children, posing the subjects on the ground is a great option. **Bottom**—Here the family relaxed and had fun because the photographer took the time to explain the positioning and poses, then playfully talked with the clients.

parent—how and where you would like them to stand or sit. This first person is the anchor in the image. With the first subject in place, you can return to the camera position and direct the other subjects, helping them assume the desired positions and poses. You can tell them where to stand and how to turn, lean, move their head, or shift an arm or leg. As the subjects get into place, take a moment to notice the subtle behaviors and relationships between them. This is our chance to study the relationships among the family members and determine who gets along in the family, who is the dominant family member, and who is the peacemaker. Recognizing these and other tendencies will help you to understand how to set up the poses and who to talk to directly.

With the main subject in position, you'll need to arrange the other subjects. Make sure that each subject is in a pose that seems natural to

Top—In this image, the photographer is showing the clients exactly what she is looking for in the position of the arms. Image by www.jwchandler.com. **Bottom**—The pose suggested by the photographer resulted in a close, tight arrangement of the family. This pleasing composition shows the emotional closeness of the family.

The calm, quiet voice of the photographer evoked the serene expressions on these young ladies. The image was captured with a Nikon D2X. The image was created in a natural light studio setting with a shutter speed of 1/160, an aperture of f/5.6, and an ISO of 400.

them and verbally coax them into a refined variation of the pose. Stepping back and surveying the grouping will help you to spot clothing mishaps, awkward hands and arms, and distance between the family members.

It is a good idea to keep the clients interacting with you at this time so they cannot focus on their anxiety over being photographed. For the younger client, talking, telling stories, and asking questions will keep them looking and focused in your direction.

EVOKING EMOTIONS

There are a few techniques that will improve your connection and communication with the clients:

- Keep the session moving briskly. Don't allow for long pauses between moving the subjects and pressing the shutter button. A quick pace will keep the looks fresh and real.
- Keep connected to the client. Constant talk, using reassuring language, and asking questions will keep you connected to your client during the session. Ask questions while moving reflectors, changing a CF card, or any time you are not focused fully on your subjects. One

advantage of asking questions is that you will have more information about the client to set up new poses, show relationships, and find out what is important to them—and this will allow you to create and sell more images.

- Keep a positive attitude. Constantly compliment the client about how well they prepared for the session, the special effort they made, and how well they pose and take direction from you. Giving positive feedback when things are going well boosts your client's confidence in what you are doing and how they are performing. When things are

Smile with Your Eyes

To elicit a relaxed and warm expression in formal portraits, just ask your subjects to smile with their eyes. Explain that you are not looking for a wide-open grin, but a more pleasing closed-mouth smile. Ask them to think of something pleasant. You can prompt children to smile by asking them to think about their favorite candy or treat—or their pet.

This photograph of a brother and sister shows a planned design. Note that the background angles form an "X" pattern. The children's faces were positioned right in the center of the pattern. I captured this image using a FujiFilm FinePix S2Pro. The exposure was f/22 at $^{1}/_{125}$ and ISO 400. The focal length was 35mm.

The subjects in this image appear grounded due to the horizontal positioning of the teen in the forefront. The natural diffused lighting in the background helped to make the group stand out. This image was made with a Nikon D2X. The exposure was f/4.8 at 1/200 and ISO 200. I used a 70–200mm f/2.8 lens set at 70mm.

not going perfectly or you are struggling with equipment, use your sense of humor to lighten the mood or ask the client to help you fix the situation. In doing this, you are keeping the client involved and connected to the session. Maintain a positive frame of mind, smile, and show your clients how much you enjoy what you are doing.

- Keep your subjects' expressions fresh. Expression elevates a simple portrait to a work of art. Expression helps to show who the client is on the inside, not just what he looks like. Your subject's expression also helps to tell a story, and when you're photographing multiple subjects, expression can show the relationship between them. Once you have connected with your clients, you can encourage a look and attitude that expresses the family members' relationships to one another. Try to capture loud, outgoing, jovial families laughing, smiling, and interacting in a casual manner. Ask them to tell you about their most embarrassing moment—or you can tell them about yours—then quickly capture the moment. You can direct a more serious, traditional family into a formal pose in which all of the subjects are looking directly at the camera.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ASKING BEFORE TOUCHING

Unless you have established a close relationship, you should never touch your subject while recommending a pose. The issue can be "touchier" still if you are a male photographer posing female subjects. Always use verbal cues to get your subjects into the desired pose when possible. If that doesn't work, try to determine your subject's comfort level. If you ask to touch them to help ensure they have the pose as you want it and they hesitate to give their consent, offer to demonstrate what you want them to do instead.

It can be helpful to work with an assistant in the camera room. He or she can stand near the clients and communicate with the subjects as you offer posing instructions from the camera position. As an added benefit, you can also ask your assistant to hold reflectors.

MEETING CHALLENGES

There are times when a positive approach and attitude will not be enough to achieve a successful and enjoyable session. Here are several tips that will help you make the best of a challenging situation.

Working with Toddlers and Young Children. Before the family arrives, have children's music playing in the background. This can help to start the session on a cheerful note. It is important to establish and maintain a positive, playful mood when working with very young children. From the moment you meet the child, look directly at them when talking to them (this may mean getting down to their eye level). Immediately tell them how happy you are to see them and what fun you are going to have playing with them. Have the parent hold the young child in their arms to start. Talk directly to the child when they are in the adult's arms.

John Teague, a photographer in northern California, has developed an approach that young children respond well to: During the consultation, he asks the parent to put a few of the child's favorite toys into a brown paper bag and bring it to the session. In the camera room or at the scene, the photographer can bring out the child's favorite toys, one at a time. Realize that the toys may then end up in the photograph. You can also ask

Facing page—A candid shot can easily capture a subject's personality. This precious photo is enhanced by the sweet gesture of the little girl holding her daddy's hand. The exposure was f/3.2 at 1/40 and ISO 400. The focal length was 31mm. **Below**—Simplicity can make for a dramatic and stunning image. By placing the playful child in the center and vignetting the corners, the boy became the focal point of the image. This image was designed using the rule of thirds. This image was taken with a Nikon D2X. The exposure was f/3.3 at 1/40 and ISO 400. The focal length was 22mm.

Above and facing page—When it comes to working with young children, you're bound to find yourself presented with a wide array of moods and some fantastic photo opportunities.

the parent to bring a favorite snack (one that's not messy) for the child to have during the session. Small edible items like Cheerios are good for giving the child to hold and eat without having the food show in the photo.

A successful session with a young child depends on timing the session so that you can work with the child when they are likely to be in the best mood. Most young children do well in the early part of the day, before

Photographing a family with teens can be a wonderful experience. Being playful, funny, and silly can set the mood for fabulous family interaction images. Asking the parents to kiss the teen always leads to fun expressions and poses. This image was created in the family's dining room. The French doors leading outside were opened, providing a large, soft light source. The subjects placed in front of a fabric background. With the distance between the subject and camera being limited to a few feet, a wide-angle lens was needed. This image was captured with a Nikon D2x and a Tamron 17–50mm lens. The shutter was set at 1/80 and the aperture was f/4.

lunch and nap time. Regardless of the time of day and all you do to prepare for the session, young children frequently do not cooperate during the session. Explaining this to parents during the consultation will help your clients understand that things sometimes do not go perfectly.

What do you do if the child does not want to participate? Have one of the parents hold the young child in their arms for the portrait. Another

way to pose the family is to have them lie on the floor with the young child between the parents. As a last resort, try a play break. Allow the child to take a few moments to play with their toys and relax. Pushing a young child to do something they are not interested in rarely works.

Working with Teens. As any portrait photographer will tell you, getting a teenager to cooperate during a session can be a difficult task. It is not uncommon for the teenager to be extremely reluctant to participate in the session. Most do not want to attend activities with their family—especially when it is an event where they have to act as if they want to be around family members. One of the best ways to get a teenager to participate is to talk directly to them about how important they are in the session. Teenagers want to feel important and attractive. From the moment you meet them, tell them how good they look, comment on their choice of clothes, the color of their clothes, or their eye color. Pointing out something positive about them will get their focus off of the activity and onto them. You may also be able to win their cooperation by asking for their help (if they are the type of teen who wants to help others) or by committing to take photos of them alone that they would enjoy having. Every teenager would love images of themselves looking like a model for their Facebook or MySpace profile pages. It only takes a few moments to capture images of the teen alone in a contemporary pose that they will enjoy.

It did not take much to get these two smiling! By simply asking the teen to hug his dad from behind, the playful expressions happened naturally. Captured in the clients' home, this image was created with a Nikon D2X and Tamron 17–50mm lens. The ISO was 200, the shutter speed $1/80$ and the aperture f/4.

Facing page—*Top:* Try different perspectives to create compelling images for your clients. Here, the pose and the baby's expression convey all the fun he is having—and including mom and dad in the frame help to tell the story of a day at the beach. *Bottom:* One trick to getting the classic images of faces close together is to tell the client to pose cheek to cheek with their baby or child. Most people will naturally hold the baby down or on their hip, but the photos they love are the two faces next to each other.

Working with Dads. It takes a special skill to make a reluctant father comfortable during the session. Start off with a friendly greeting and thank them for coming. Acknowledge how important their time is and tell them how wonderful it is that they care enough about their family to create images of them as keepsakes. Dads frequently don't feel comfortable having their photos taken. One easy way to help them feel comfortable and make them feel like an important part of the session is to have them help you. Once you have greeted each family member and have directly spoken with the dad, ask for his help with some aspect of the session. Dads are commonly the take-charge person in the family, and they can be uncomfortable taking directions and relinquishing control. By requesting their assistance, they stop focusing on their discomfort and feel useful.

Just let dads do what they do naturally—play with the kids—and you will have spontaneous and fun images. This image was captured with natural light in a studio setting. A soft gold reflector was placed to the right of the subjects, across from the light source. Once the image was downloaded, it was lightened using Nik Software's Viveza filter. This gave the image more contrast and removed the gray cast that is common in the skin tones in digital portraits.

BANANA REPUBLIC

3. DESIGNING THE PORTRAIT

THE IMPORTANCE OF DESIGN

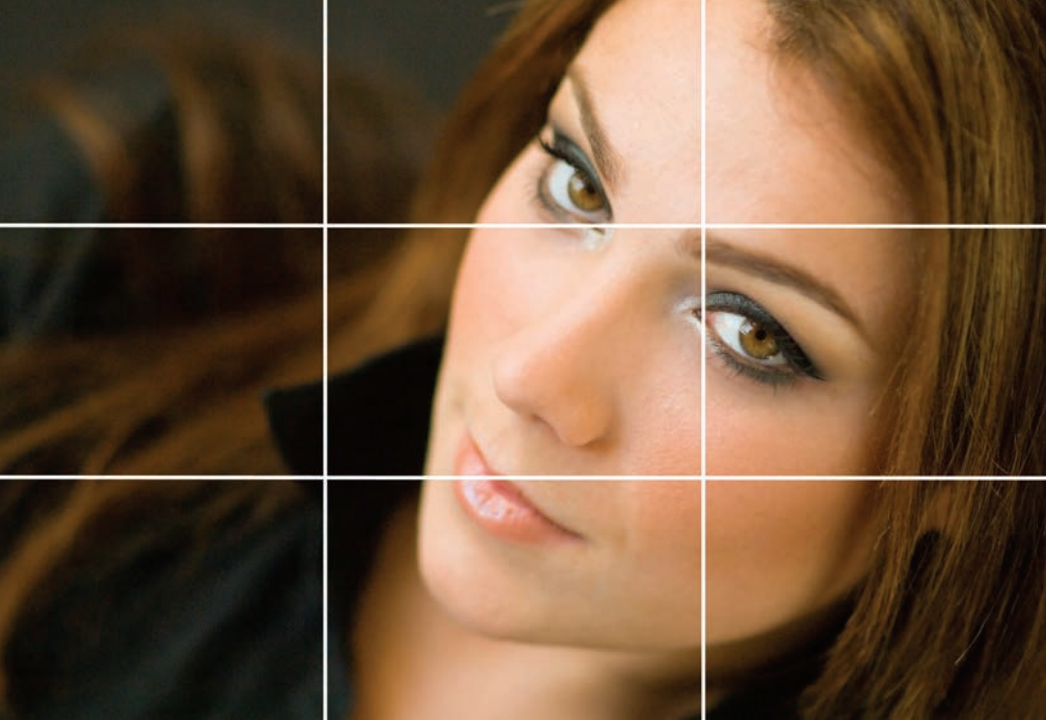
Never underestimate the importance of posing your subject. In portraiture, expert posing and lighting separate a professional's work from an amateur's images. Additionally, poor posing is readily evident to the general public. When the subject's pose appears unnatural, the viewer will feel uncomfortable, even if they are not sure what it is that is wrong with the image. An awkward pose can ruin a technically perfect image.

Before posing your subjects, you should have a solid understanding of the basic rules of portrait design. These foundational concepts will help you to create photographs that are visually pleasing and engaging and to artfully show the relationships between the subjects who appear in the portrait.

COMPOSITION

The term "composition" is used to describe the arrangement of the visual elements that make up an image. Where the visual objects appear in

Facing page—There will be time on a location shoot when you will not be able to seat the family and must photograph them standing. Encourage them to stand close together; you can connect them by having them touch. With the subjects posed close together, the focus is on their faces. The baby's belly was tickled right before this image was captured. **Below**—One hour before sunset is the time some photographer's call the "sweet light." At this time of day, the setting sun creates a warm glow on the subjects.

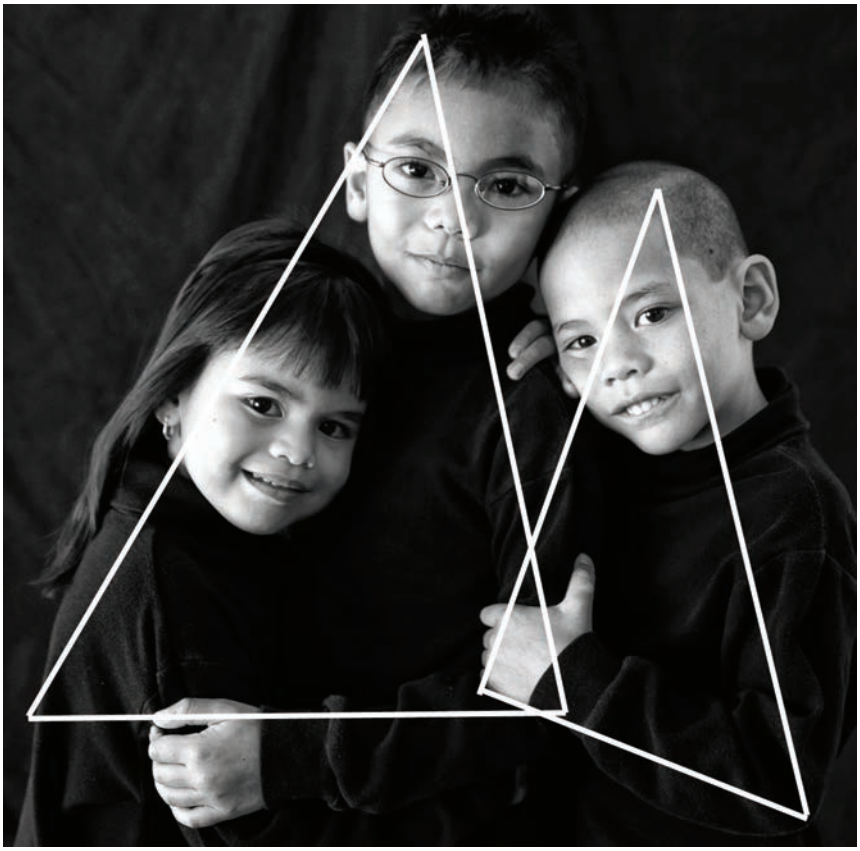


Left—Using the rule of thirds can help you to create more dynamic images. Placement of the subject's eyes at a point where the thirds lines intersect creates a compelling image. **Facing page**—For a casual, relaxed portrait, allow the family to connect naturally and connect in any way the want.

the frame, how close they are to one another, and their relationship to each other are all considerations for the photographer when designing a pleasing image. Composition allows the photographer to express his/her idea to the audience. Without composition, the images may be nothing more than a frozen moment in time—a picture without a story. In family portraiture, the intention is not only to document the ages and likeness of the family members; a good portrait should also show the relationships between the subjects and the emotions of the family members.

There are several design elements that should be used in creating a composition to draw the viewer's eye into the image and through the frame. These elements include the rule of thirds, leading lines, S and C curves, repeating patterns, balance and tension, and color harmony. The goal of a skilled photographer is to use design rules and elements intuitively while working. Design concepts allow the photographer to see the possibilities.

Rule of Thirds. The rule of thirds is a compositional tool used by photographers to determine the most effective subject placement. In essence, the rule states that subjects are more visually compelling to viewers when placed one-third from any one of the outer edges of the frame (horizontally, vertically, or both). Any image can be divided into nine parts, with two equally spaced horizontal lines and two equally spaced vertical lines. The points at which these lines intersect is thought to be an excellent place to position your subject or object of interest. In family portraiture, the nine segments created by the rules of third are your guide for subject placement. While it is a good idea to use the rule of thirds as a template for achieving dynamic, appealing subject placement, as you are working with human forms as opposed to still life subjects, achieving the desired placement may not always be possible.



Top—A strong composition makes an image shine. Here, repeating patterns, varying head heights, and leading lines work in tandem to capture the eye and draw the gaze from one subject's face to the next. **Bottom**—When you have children of varying ages and heights, you can step back and look for ways to connect them. With its repeating pattern of triangles, this image evokes a feeling of harmony. Simply tipping the head in toward the tallest child created the important connecting element in this image.

In the image below, the rule of thirds was used as a guide to determine the positioning of the eyes. As you can see, the arrangement leads the viewer's eye into the image and creates interest.

Repeating Patterns. Repeating patterns in images also convey a sense of visual rhythm and harmony. An easy way to create a pattern is by placement of the heads. In the image below, the children's heads were positioned to create a sense of rhythm. Note that in this image, the youngest, smallest child was placed at the left. This was done so that the viewer's eye travels from the left and up through the image, passing each face in the repeating pattern of heads.

Repeating patterns are a great tool to use when designing portraits of children and large families. By relying upon a simple placement of the family members, then paying attention to the placement of their hands and arms, you can easily produce an image with compositional harmony and visual rhythm.

Leading Lines. *Horizontal, Vertical, and Diagonal Lines.* Vertical and horizontal lines convey a feeling of motion in an image, especially when the lines form repeating patterns. Vertical lines represent stature and strength. Horizontal lines create a feeling of calm and stability. Diagonal

To create a feeling of connection, I placed the children very close together, with heads, shoulders, arms, and hands touching. Most siblings will give you a hard time when you want to pose them like this; however, if you give them enough encouragement and tell them you will also photograph them separately, most children will cooperate. This particular pose is touching and will be cherished once the siblings are grown and miss the days of childhood.

These two images were created as a surprise for Mother's Day. When the father brought the children into the studio, his goal was to create one image to give to his wife. However, by creating several different group poses, individual poses, and unique storytelling angles, I was able to sell an entire album.

lines can also be used in the photographic frame to lead the viewer's gaze to the subject. Those of us who live in the Western world read from left to right. Therefore, when we take in an image, we tend to start at the left edge of the frame and follow real or implied lines in the composition to view the main subject of the image.

When posing your subjects, note the overall position of the subject's body and how it relates to the frame, as this will impact the visual flow of the image. For example, in the photos above, care was taken to have the subjects pose in such a way that the viewer's eye would travel from the bottom-left corner and into the image. In the photograph taken from a high camera angle, the subject and story were made more dynamic by capturing the image from an unusual vantage point.

S Curves and C Curves. Curved lines are also visually compelling. They are a natural choice for drawing the viewer's gaze through the image. A curved line or curved subject represents gracefulness and tranquility. Two commonly used shapes are the S curve and the C curve.

When posing a family, an S curve is an easy pattern to follow to establish compositional harmony. An S curve pulls the viewer's eye through the image, keeping their attention.

A C curve can be used in photos of parents and children. Having the adult wrap their arms around the child from the side view evokes a feeling of security and affection.

Balance and Tension. Balance is the visual aspect of an image that creates a feeling of harmony, sense of equilibrium, and an even distribution of weight in the composition. To create a balanced image, you must evenly space the objects or ensure the objects are of the same size and weight. If you have several small objects on one side, you can balance them with one large one on the other side. Balance can also be achieved by the tonal value of the objects. If the objects on one side of the composition are dark, place objects of a similar tone on the other side of the frame.

In family portraiture, a sense of balance is important. Family portraits that evoke a feeling of harmony and peace have traditionally been most popular. By use of balance, the photographer can consciously place the subjects and objects to achieve a positive tone and atmosphere.

Tension is more commonly used in commercial and art photography to convey an uneasy sense or to drive the viewer's eye to a particular area of an image. In family portraiture, tension can be used to tell a story. There are several ways to create tension in an image: by pushing the subject to

Here the father is the dominant subject in the image. By placing the boy as shown, their relationship is now evident in the image. Balance was created by placing the subjects' heads at a diagonal from the bottom of the image to the top.

Facing page—With a teen, expression can say it all. The generation gap and tension between father and teen is playfully portrayed by the placement of the father over the shoulder of the teen. Storytelling images like this one help you to sell albums to your clients. **Right**—With a little coaching, you can create precious images that parents will love. Here, the glow of the setting sun only enhances the warmth in the childrens' embrace.

the very edge of the image, leaving an unexpected amount of space between the subjects within the composition, and by the interplay of positive and negative space. Tension need not always provoke a negative or uneasy emotion. It can also be used to display playfulness, spontaneity, and family relationships.

Color Harmony. Color has the power to evoke emotion and enhance the mood of an image. In family portraits, color is used to enhance the mood of the image and the people in it. Cool colors depict remoteness. Warm colors tend to depict emotional warmth and comfort.

To achieve the most beautiful image possible, you will want to coordinate the colors in the background and clothing to help create the desired mood. Selecting colors that complement the skin tones will create a feeling of warmth and harmony.

Color can also be used to move the eyes of the viewer around the image composition, pulling the viewer's eye into and through the image.

TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

If you want to create a wider array of images for a family, try changing your angle of view. Instead of shooting all of your images from eye level,

Portrait Trends

Edgy, unposed images and fashion-inspired shots are a hit with teens. Consider adding some of these shots of the teens and family group to your repertoire. Unless the family specifically requests this style of image from their session, however, the bulk of their images should be traditional or relational shots.

Left—This simple image was created with a high camera angle. To create an image like this, ask the client to sit on the ground (if on location) or to stand on a stepstool (in the studio). This angle is easy to capture at the beach, when the children are already sitting with the family. After capturing the family group pose, move in to capture several different angles. **Facing page**—When it comes to working with toddlers, it may be best to let them play and interact with the parent. Hugging, cuddling, kissing, and playing create wonderfully emotive, storytelling portraits.

try shooting from above the subjects or from the ground. Once you place your subject in the composition, move around, looking for unique perspectives from which you can capture the image. Keeping basic design principles in mind, seek out a view you would not normally capture. Look down and follow the lines of the profile, the neck, arms, and hands, then drop down to a lower camera angle and use the leading lines to direct the eye toward the family. The angle of view you choose can help express emotion or mood. It can give the viewer a sense of being small if looking up, or a sense of being big if looking down.

TROUBLESHOOTING

When you are working with a client, take the time to step back, look over the scene, and see if it appears balanced. Over time, you will be able to do this quickly and intuitively. Until then, use this time to ask questions and get to know the family so they do not become uncomfortable as you survey the scene.

In addition to ensuring that the composition is balanced, you'll want to make sure that the selected background complements the family mem-

All you need to create beautiful portraits of a family is a large window and a reflector to fill in the shadow side of the face. The warm light from a window in the living room created a flattering setting for photographing this family.

An unusual angle can change an average portrait into something special. Capturing the above images from an uncommon angle added impact and interest in these images.

bers' coloring. You'll also want to check the direction of the light and ask yourself if it is falling onto the subjects in a flattering manner.

Move the subjects or move around the subjects to create rhythm and repeating patterns in the composition. Work to place key components of the image in the one-third areas of the frame. Step back to see if you can incorporate other design elements into the scene to make it more interesting.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL PORTRAITS

Photographers have used the following strategies to make appealing photographs of families for years:

- Avoid photographing the back of the hand. This is especially true when the hand is close to the face. The hand can look like a large block without form. Try to photograph the side of the hand; this is much more flattering.
- Ask your clients not to wear sleeveless shirts. There are two reasons for this: (1) Wearing a sleeveless shirt can make your subjects' arms look larger, and (2) The skin on the upper arms is bright and will draw attention away from the subject's face. The only time when sleeveless shirts or dresses work is when you are photographing the family from a distance at a location such as a beach or park, or when a woman wears a formal dress for a formal portrait. In this situation, care must be taken to pose the arm in a flattering position.
- Avoid colors or patterns that distract the viewer's eye from the family.
- Turn subjects at a 45 degree angle away from the camera. Turning the body straight to the camera or at a 90 degree angle is not as flattering.
- Always ask your subjects to sit tall.

Left—In just a few moments, you can capture portraits from many angles and record many different moods. To create this image, I asked the mother to tip her head toward the father. This simple prompt added warmth to the portrait. **Facing page**—In these images, I had the subjects join hands and photographed the scene from above. When taking a close-up shot of two or more subjects, have them hug, bring their heads close so they are cheek to cheek, and have one or more of the subjects close their eyes.

- Having subjects lean slightly forward from the waist lends a slight feeling of movement and friendliness to the portrait.
- Ask the client to project the chin (e.g., push it slightly forward) to eliminate double chins.
- Check to ensure that your male client's head is not tilted toward his higher shoulder. This is a feminine pose.
- Avoid showing too much of the whites of the eyes or having the eyes turned until there is no white showing on one side of the iris.
- Crop the image above or below the joints of the arms, wrist, and legs—*not* at the joint.
- When photographing a subject with glasses, have them tilt their head slightly downward to avoid the glare. You can also change your angle of view or place the light source directly in front of the subject.

STYLE: TRADITIONAL OR RELATIONAL?

There are two basic family portrait styles: traditional (a basic documentation of the family at a particular time in their lives) and relational (an image that shows the relationships between the subjects).

Traditional portraits feature conservative posing and more formal clothing. These images are usually made in a studio environment, and the clients are typically posed against a canvas background. Traditional family portraits, when shot on location, usually show the family in matched, casual clothing.

Relational portraiture relies on having a good technical knowledge base, a facility with design techniques, and an understanding of the dynamics of the family structure. This type of photography is very popular with clients today. Many families have had their fill of the more traditional family portrait style and want something a little more personal.

Top—Family portrait surroundings can be very important to capturing the lifestyle of a family. Here the beach created a naturally casual and inviting environment to show this family's connection to each other and their personalities. **Bottom**—The rays from this gorgeous sunset were used to silhouette this playful moment between a father and son. The image was beautifully composed, and the emphasis is on the special bond the father has with his child. This image was made with a FujiFilm FinePixS2Pro. The exposure was f/19 at $^{1}/_{125}$ and ISO 200. The focal length was 38mm.

Before completely abandoning the traditional style of portraiture, make sure that the family is looking for relational photos. Just as there are trends in clothing and styles, there are trends in photography. It is important to stay on top of the latest ideas, and incorporating new trends can breathe new life into your work. However, balance is needed to maintain your style and meet the client's desires.

4. USING NATURAL LIGHT INDOORS

THE NATURAL LIGHT ADVANTAGE

We live in a three-dimensional world, where the objects we encounter have width, length, and depth. Paintings, drawings, and photographic images, on the other hand, are two-dimensional. To create a feeling of depth, the artist must create highlights and shadows to show the subject's form. To attain this goal, you must learn how to manipulate and direct light.

Much of this book is focused on how to control and use natural and existing light in a studio environment or on location. There are many advantages to using existing light, particularly for the beginning photographer who has not yet mastered or acquired expensive studio lighting equipment: it is relatively easy to work with existing light, you can work at any

Keeping the background and clothing all in the same tones, hues, or color will help to draw focus to the family and their faces. The image below was created near a large window. The white background and white coordinating clothing helps to lock the gaze on the family.

location without a great deal of equipment, and location work presents a variety of unique backgrounds. In addition, working on location makes it easy to produce beautiful, three-dimensional images.

Location work is beneficial to your clients as well. Location sessions feel less stressful to clients. If you are shooting in the family home, for instance, the client doesn't have to worry about packing up the family and fighting traffic to arrive on time at your studio. Also, when you can work with existing light on location, you can often avoid using flash, which can startle your children and babies.

In fairness, there are benefits to working in the studio as well: you have the ability to control the light, and the focus is completely on the client—not the environment around them.

QUALITY OF LIGHT

Understanding the quality of light is essential to creating natural light portraits. For instance, sunlight at noon on a cloudless day has predictable qualities: it is a very intense, hard, direct source. The sun's light can be softened (or diffused) by clouds, objects above the subject (e.g., tree branches or an architectural overhang) or, indoors, by a window or window curtain.

Hard versus Soft Light. Hard light is direct light created by a source that is relatively small in size. It produces hard-edged shadows, bright colors, and bright highlights. Hard light that comes from above the subject (e.g., midday sun) is the worst offender, as it creates unflattering dark

Here, the soft light from a natural light studio is flattering to both the young woman and her mother. This image was captured by moving to the side of the subjects and asking them to look back at the camera.

Left—Soft side lighting created beautiful tonal depth in this photograph. The texture from all of the fabrics around the subject creates a frame for this lovely girl's smooth face. Finally, the catchlights in her eyes really draw you into the image. I used a Nikon D2X to capture the shot. The exposure was f/5.6 at $^{1}/_{180}$ and ISO 200. I used a 28–75mm f/2.8 lens set at 68mm. **Right**—In this image, captured with a Nikon D2X and a Tamron 70–200mm lens, the shallow depth of field (f/2.8) draws the viewer's attention to the brother closest to the lens. This gives the image a dramatic and unusual feel.

shadows under the subject's eyes and nose. (Though the sun itself is huge, its distance from the subject makes it small in relation to the subject.)

Soft light is ideal for portraiture. Such light comes from a larger light source relative to the subject. Outdoors, natural light is softer when the sun is low in the sky, as it is during the hour after sunrise or the hour before sunset. At this time of day, the sun's rays travel horizontally rather than from above. Therefore, there are no harsh shadows produced as there are at midday.

Indoors, the light coming from a window near your subject will be larger and softer than overhead sunlight. Harsh studio lights like a barebulb flash can be made soft when a modifier such as a softbox, umbrella, or reflector is introduced. For instance, light from a flash housed in a softbox will be larger, softer, and more flattering than light from a bare bulb flash.

No matter its source, soft light produces paler, softer shadows, and more subdued colors in your images. It can also enhance the appearance of your subject's skin and create a three-dimensional feel in an image (more on this in a minute).

Finding Soft Light. What does soft light look like? Look for light that softly illuminates the area you are working in. As you walk into a room, scan for soft, full light that comes through a window, doorway, or other opening. You are looking for light that illuminates the subject or object from one side then falls off softly on the other side.

Soft light should produce a three-dimensional look on your subject. When observing your subject, you should be able to see a highlight side and a shadow side—and the highlight and shadow areas should show detail. In order to achieve this sculpted look, you must make sure that the light travels from the side of an object, not from the front. Front lighting will give your subject a flat look.

A Bright Idea

A white or light-colored structure (e.g., a wall) more than 15 feet from the window can act as a reflector, producing ideal light. Likewise, you can position a reflector outside of a low window to direct more natural light into the room to improve your lighting in low-light conditions.

Keep your camera at the ready and your eyes open at all times. You never know when you will have the opportunity to capture a delightful image.

When working with a family during a session, move around the subjects and capture images that tell a story. This interesting perspective of the husband and wife was shot using a wide-open Tamron 28–75mm f/2.8 lens.

Window light can work beautifully for portraits. The best results are achieved when the sun's light comes from above the window and bounces into the room—not when the sun is lined up with the window. When the light is coming from a higher angle and bouncing around the room, the lighting effect that results resembles the look produced by a softbox.

FINDING THE RIGHT LIGHT

It can be difficult to gauge the quality of light. A light meter can be used to measure the quantity of light, but it will not describe the quality of light. You will need a trained eye to walk into an environment and immediately find soft light. To develop this skill, practice looking for soft light everywhere you go. When inside buildings, look for large natural light sources like large windows. A window that's at least 10x5 feet in size and a few feet off the ground makes an ideal light source. With the window at this height, the natural falloff of the light can be used to your advantage, as it will create a darker area at the bottom of the image that will help draw your eye to the subjects of the image.

When you are seeking soft lighting, be aware that light reflected off of parked cars, the window of another building, or a metal structure can produce an unappealing lighting effect. Colored objects outside the window (e.g., a house with blue vinyl siding) can create a color cast in the light streaming into the room. Your best bet in such a case may be simply to find another room to shoot in. If this isn't possible, you might want to try setting a custom white balance to resolve the color contamination issue. Alternatively, you could try to correct the color cast in postproduction. Note that shooting in a second-floor room often improves the odds that your light will be free from color casts that light can pick up.

Once you've located the ideal window light source, you can set up your natural light studio in one of two ways:

- To create more dramatic lighting and a higher light ratio (this is discussed on page 61), position the subject 90 degrees from the camera, creating a triangle from the window, to the subject, to the camera. The subject then should have light falling on their side, not their front or back. A reflector or subtractive panel should be placed on the opposite side of the window, with the subject in the middle. Again, be sure to avoid photographing the subject near a window when the sun is low in the sky and level with the window. This creates a hard light quality that will result in unwanted dark shadows on the subject's face.
- Another effective option—particularly in homes—is to have the light in front of the subjects. This lighting approach works particularly well when photographing children and babies. In this situation, you may need to use furniture or a black panel to block some of the light in order to create definition and shadow. This practice, called subtractive lighting, is described below.

The light that illuminated this subject came from a large window in the family room of the client's home.

FINDING THE SWEET SPOT

When you walk into a client's home, look for light coming from a large natural source such as a living room window. Learn to scan the area and find the "sweet spot"—the place where the light is falling off and creating dimension in the objects you see.

CONTROLLING LIGHT

Controlling light is essential to your ability to create beautiful portraits. When it comes to controlling natural light, there are two main strategies: you can add light by introducing a reflector or remove light by using a subtractive lighting panel. Indoors, a large window will produce scattered light. You can use a reflector to focus that light more intensely on the subject. For example, if the sunlight is coming from the side of the subject, you will want to bounce or reflect light onto the shadow side of the subject's face.

There are many varieties on the market. The most popular reflectors for family portraits are white (when you need a soft reflection or want to diffuse harsh light), soft gold (to add a touch of warmth to the image), gold (for an exaggerated warm light), silver (to add definition and edge to the image), and black (used to subtract light or create modeling).

Subtractive Lighting. There will be times when the light is flat (i.e., when it does not produce distinct highlight and shadow sides on your subject's face. To create a shadow or appearance of a shadow side, use a black panel close to the subject on the (intended) shadow side. This is an

Left—*Top:* Many living rooms feature large windows, making the living room a commonly used portrait location. Here a diffuser was placed between the direct light coming through the window and the client. A silver reflector was placed across from the main light to fill in the shadow areas. Photo by Max Root, age 8. *Bottom:* By looking for the soft, full light, and then controlling the amount and direction, you can create beautiful portraits in a small area of the client's home. **Right**—*Top:* In this image, a large window in the family room was used as the light source. To create a background, a sofa throw owned by the family was held by an assistant on one side and clamped to a stand on the other. The children sat on the sofa edge to have their photos captured while being coached to smile. *Bottom:* After the four children were photographed together, the baby was photographed with his mother.

especially good choice when you want strong definition, as when photographing a man.

When working on location, you can use furniture, walls, and objects as your "subtractive panel" source.

A black panel was used on the side of the boy's face to add slight definition.

Here, the couple was placed next to the living room window at a 90 degree angle and facing the camera. This gives a nice shadow on their left side, creating the appearance of form and depth in the image.

LIGHT RATIO

A light ratio is a numeric description of the difference between the light intensity falling on the highlight side and the shadow side of the subject's face. The higher the ratio, the more dramatic the difference between the highlight and shadow, and the greater the contrast in the image. When the subject is evenly illuminated, there is a 1:1 ratio. When the illumination is 2:1, the highlight side of the subject is twice as bright as the shadow side. In images with a 3:1 (or higher) ratio, there is a more profound difference between the highlight and shadow areas. As artists, photographers will try and work with a high ratio to create shadow and definition in the image. This is easy to do in an indoor location. Indoors, natural light typically comes from a single source (e.g., a window or doorway) and travels in a straight line over the subject. By turning the subject to a 90 degree angle from the window and toward the camera, you will get a high light ratio.

WHITE BALANCE

All light has a distinct color temperature. Before digital photography, you had to select film that was balanced for use in a specific shooting condition—daylight-balanced film was used when you were shooting outdoors, and tungsten-balanced film was used for most indoor shots. These specialized films resolved the color shift produced by daylight (which tends to be cool) or tungsten (which tends to be warm), rendering the subjects as our sensitized eyes see the scene—in other words, as having a more neutral color. Today, we have to tell the digital camera how to handle the color temperature differences. We do this with white balance. By telling the camera what object in the scene is white, the camera can calculate the correct color temperature.

A shallow depth of field was used in these images to emphasize the girl's beautiful eyes.

Most professional-level digital cameras offer an automatic white balance option as well as several presets for various lighting conditions. You can also create a custom white balance, which will give you the best results. It is a good idea to set a custom white balance each time the lighting situation changes.

Each camera manufacturer will have a different method for setting a custom white balance, so check the camera user's manual for details.

TIME-SAVING CAMERA SETTINGS

There are a few basic steps you can take to help cut your postproduction work and save time. First, set a custom white balance, then select the ISO that is best for the environment you are working in. Lastly, take a meter reading with a handheld incident meter to determine your shutter speed and aperture.

You will have to determine the ISO, aperture, and shutter speed based upon the end result you want to see in the portrait. The ISO setting in digital cameras determines how sensitive your camera's image sensor is to light. In lower light conditions, you will need to select a higher ISO setting. In brightly lit areas, you can use a lower ISO. In digital photography, like in film photography, the higher the ISO, the "grainier" (or, in digital terms, "noisier") the image. As a portrait photographer, you will want

to use the lowest ISO you can. To contend with any digital noise (which will appear as random pixels of the wrong color), professional-level digital cameras now feature built-in noise reduction software. While this technology certainly makes noise less noticeable, your best bet is shooting at the lowest-possible ISO setting to avoid the problem in the first place.

METERING THE SCENE

Today's digital cameras have advanced built-in reflective light meters. However, they can be fooled when they are used to meter nonaverage scenes. If you are shooting on a brightly lit beach, for instance, the meter, in an attempt to average the scene to 18 percent gray, will recommend settings that will produce an underexposed shot. By using a handheld incident light meter that measures the light falling on the subject you will have more accurate exposures.

It is a good idea to calibrate your meter to your camera. (For information on how this is done, consult the meter's instruction manual.) Once you've calibrated your meter, it is fairly easy to take a reading. Set the meter to the desired ISO. For most cameras, the optimal ISO is 100; however, that is too low in many scenarios. On a bright day, you might need to start at ISO 200, a sunset scene may require an ISO of 400 and, for images taken after sunset, you may have to use an ISO of 800. Make sure your meter is set to daylight reading, not flash.

Standing next to the subject, but not blocking the light source, point the dome of the meter toward the camera. The meter will read the light falling on the subject and will recommend an aperture and shutter speed that will produce a proper exposure.

Make the Most of the Lighting

- Keep the light source to side of subject for a more dramatic lighting effect.
- Place the subject in front of the light source and use a black panel to subtract light, creating a shadow side for a less dramatic but more dimensional effect.
- Use a reflector to add light on the shadow side of subject and illuminate the eye farthest from the light source.
- Introduce a subtractive black panel when ambient light is too strong or too flat.
- Have subject at least 5 feet away from background to allow the background to go dark.
- Select an aperture setting of f/1.4–f/5.6 to blur the environment behind and in front of the subject, keeping the viewer's eye on the subject.

APERTURE, SHUTTER SPEED, AND CREATIVITY

Aperture and shutter speed are two technical elements that you can control to add creativity and interest to your images. The aperture controls how much light is let in through the lens and will strike the image sensor. It will also establish the depth of field in your image. Depth of field is an important creative tool for photographers. It allows you to decide what area of the scene, from front to back, will be in focus. If you use a large aperture (e.g., f/1.4 to f/2.8), the background will be

Facing page—These images were made using a shallow depth of field. This choice added interest and drama in the portraits.

blurry and out of focus. If you want everything in focus use a smaller aperture such as f/22.

A shallow depth of field is a wonderful way to show the delicate features on babies and children. Coming in very close to the face and using f/1.4 if possible, you can get just the eyelashes in perfect focus and let the rest of the face go soft.

The shutter speed setting determines the length of time that the image sensor will be exposed to light. Using a faster shutter speed will prevent the blur that can result from camera shake and can freeze the subject's movement. When you are working in a low-light situations (e.g., in a client's home), you may need to select a slower shutter speed to allow enough light to enter the camera to achieve a proper exposure. When a slower shutter speed is required, you will need to mount the camera on a tripod to stabilize it and prevent blur due to camera shake.

On the other hand, a slow shutter speed can sometimes be a good thing in family portraiture. If you are trying to capture the family naturally indoors where the light is low, the blurring will give a feeling of movement and life to the image. Imagine a parent picking up a small child or swinging them in the air. These are natural actions for a family and should be captured as such.

IMAGE CAPTURE

With all that we can do with Photoshop, it is a good idea to simultaneously capture your images in the high-quality JPEG *and* RAW formats if your camera allows. If not, then capture only RAW files (images saved in this format are similar to latent negatives, unaltered by development). A dual-capture approach allows you quick access to lower-resolution images for proofing and RAW images to adjust for problems.

Media Cards. You will need fairly large media cards to hold both RAW and high-quality JPEG images. In a typical session, most photographers shoot 35 to 70 images, and some shoot more than 100. In most cases, an 8G card will be able to store 70 to 100 dual-capture image files.

The speed of the memory card is another important consideration. (Consult the user's manual to determine which cards should be used with your camera model.) A fast card is a wise investment. After spending the day shooting several portrait sessions, you'll appreciate having the ability to upload your image files quickly.

5. OUTDOOR PHOTOGRAPHY

There are times when working in a client's home or at another indoor location isn't feasible. When you are photographing a large group or want to use a more natural backdrop to create an environmental image, for instance, selecting an outdoor location might be your best option.

For those who live in coastal communities, the beach is frequently the preferred session location. As J. Romero (www.rstudios.org) has noted, "The beach is an ideal location in southern California, as it is a familiar environment for the family and they are comfortable there."

Facing page and below—Allowing the family to do what they want to can lead to fun and unique images. On the facing page, we see an image created while the mom was playing with her baby in between setup shoots for the session. The family shown in the image below was asked to walk over to this location and stand any way they wanted.

A GROWING TREND

In the past, when a family wanted an environmental portrait, they wanted an image that showed how the family members look in a pretty environment. They were not interested in artistic expression, creative poses, or emotion-filled images that depicted the interrelationships of the subjects.

Fortunately, photojournalistic coverage, which has long been popular in wedding photography, has more recently begun to influence portrait

Facing page—In this photograph of a family staring off into the ocean, a slight vignette was added to focus the viewer's attention on the group. The family's white shirts tie in perfectly with the ocean's whitewash, ultimately unifying the photograph. This image was photographed with a Nikon D2X. The exposure was 1/160 second at f/6.3 and ISO 640.

Sage Advice

Walt Disney World photographer Mike Strickland shoots hundreds of weddings and portraits a year. He advises, "Look for the best light and put your subjects there. Don't let them choose the background. Find open shade and use your flash off camera in the same direction of the light. You want to enhance the direction of the light a little, especially when you're photographing more than two people."

photography styles, and clients are more interested than ever in purchasing relaxed and spontaneous family portraits. A wise portrait photographer will always capture the classic, posed portrait of the family along with the contemporary, unstructured, or unprompted portrait.

ADVANTAGES TO WORKING ON LOCATION

Working on location is ideal for large family groups. The traditional portrait studio normally has a 9-foot background, and posing more than five people in front of a 9-foot background is difficult—especially when you're working with adults. When doing a consultation with a client, either in person or on the phone, immediately find out the number of subjects, as that will help you determine your best portrait location and posing options.

Working on location has a second very important advantage: being able to sell a large wall portrait to the client. One of the most profitable products for the portrait photographer is a large wall portrait. A large wall portrait is also a good passive marketing tool, as your client's friends and family will see your work whenever they enter your client's home.

FINDING GREAT LOCATIONS

Find several locations in your area that are ideal for environmental family portraits. The obvious choices are nearby parks and beaches, but also look for attractive landscaping in your neighborhood, playgrounds, bike paths, historic sites, and gardens. For state-owned and historic properties, you may have to get permission and possibly a permit before the session. Don't exclude unusual locations such as open fields, rustic buildings, urban settings, and commercial development areas.

ENSURING THE BEST-POSSIBLE LIGHT

Open Shade. Upon arriving at your location, you should immediately look for the ideal place to pose the family. Choose an area where you can control the light. In a park setting, this may be an area with a full background of trees or other pleasing structures. The location should have an open sky that will illuminate the faces of the subjects. Note that shooting later in the day will allow you to work when the sun is lower in the sky and is coming from a horizontal direction rather than from overhead. When possible, pose the subjects near a large tree or other light-blocking object. This will produce the shadow side of the face, creating a pleasing light ratio and a dimensional look.

Fill Flash. You can create great images on location when the sun is low in the sky. When the lighting scenario is less than ideal, though, you can often improve your images by adding flash to fill in the shadows that can appear under the subject's eyes. When faced with a scenario in which the

Top—It can be difficult to find open shade when photographing in a park setting. However, if you wait until later in the day, the sun will be lower in the sky and behind trees or hills. Here most of the park is now in open shade due to the setting sun. To add sparkle and life to the client's eyes, fill flash was used. **Bottom**—Sometimes moving your subjects to another area of the location will improve the lighting. Here, fill flash was used to open up the shadows. Note the beautiful light coming through the trees due to the setting sun.

While on location, ask the family to do several simple activities that will provide numerous photo opportunities for you. Walking along the beach, walking toward you, walking away, the children running down the beach and the parents swinging or carrying a child are all easy, informal shots.

light on the background is brighter than the light falling on your subject, using flash can also help to balance the light and produce a more even, natural look.

There are several ways to set your flash for fill. J. Romero sets his Nikon flash on TTL with an exposure compensation of –3 and his camera set to aperture priority. He sets the flash to –3 because he wants to add just enough flash to light the eyes. Mike Strickland sets his flash between half and full power and uses an exposure of ISO 125, f/8, and 1/250.

With digital cameras, it is much easier to use fill flash correctly. Simply set your flash on manual and take a meter reading, then set your flash to 1/4 power to start. Take a test shot and make an adjustment if necessary. When the sun is setting, you may need to reset the flash several times to achieve a perfect balance between the client and the environment.

Natural Light or Flash?

Natural light creates beautiful modeling in portraits and so, ideally, outdoor portraits should be made using only natural light and reflectors. However, many clients seem to prefer images made with flash. Photographer J. Romero shares his experience: "I always use flash on the beach. Though I prefer natural light, I've found that when I show images made with natural light and those made with flash, I sell more images made with flash."

Facing page—Good family portraits show the love and warmth the individuals have for one another. Having the family connect and touch gives the image a circular feel that can be cropped either square or rectangular for the finished wall portrait.

Sweet Light. When you are shooting outdoors, timing is everything when it comes to finding great light. In the hour after sunrise and the hour before sunset, the sun is low in the sky and its rays travel horizontally, rather than from overhead. Many photographers call this "sweet light." Depending upon the location of your shoot, you may not need to use any fill flash during this time. J. Romero has taken hundreds of family portraits at the beach over the years. He likes to shoot 20 minutes before sunset to capture that "golden light." He feels that the shadows produced by the sun when shooting any earlier than that are too harsh. His goal is to have the client be able to comfortably look into the sun without having to use flash. He shoots most of his images at ISO 400 on aperture priority. When the sun is low, he uses an ISO of 800 with a wide-open aperture. He feels that this allows him to create the most beautiful natural light images.

TECHNICAL TIPS FOR OUTDOOR SESSIONS

- Use a wide aperture (e.g., f/4 or f/2.8) and the longest focal length possible (e.g., something in the 150 to 200mm range) to throw the background out of focus. This is particularly important at the beach, where there may be people walking in the distance behind the subject. The longer the focal length, the more compressed the scene will appear and the more out of focus the background will be.
- Add light with reflectors whenever possible for a more natural look.
- Use flash to fill in unflattering shadows.
- Be sure to set your white balance once you arrive at the location. In park settings, the grass and trees can create a green cast in your images, which will be especially evident in the shadow areas.
- Don't use flash when the sun has almost set, as this will create the "party shot" effect. Instead, select a higher ISO and use the widest aperture possible.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL OUTDOOR SESSIONS

- Identify several locations in your area that are ideal for environmental family portraits. Don't exclude unusual locations such as open fields, rustic buildings, urban settings, and commercial development areas. Be sure that you are aware of the hours of operation (when applicable) and whether or not you must secure a permit to work at the location.
- Schedule a session for one hour after sunrise or one hour before sunset.
- For a beach session, check the tide chart to determine whether you will still be able to shoot on the sand during high tide.
- Take a sand-colored blanket to the beach and a dark-green blanket to the park. Bring a large plastic bag to take the blanket home in, as it is likely to get wet.

- When photographing large groups, bring a couple of small folding stools for your subjects to sit on. If you will be working with elderly subjects, bring sturdy folding chairs in neutral colors.
- On bright, sunny days, position subjects so that they are not looking into the sun, as this will cause them to squint. Pose them with the sun at their sides or behind them. Add fill flash to balance the light on the subjects with the brighter background when required.
- Tell your clients that they will be walking over sand or dirt and to wear comfortable shoes that match the clothing they are wearing.
- Recommend that parents pack a change of clothes for young kids, who may get wet at the beach or dirty at the park.
- Remind grown-ups that their clothing may get wet or dirty at the beach.
- If the session is at the beach, recommend that women and girls with long hair bring a headband to keep their hair out of their faces on a windy day.

To bring the subjects' heads close together, ask one parent to lean over and hug the other, then have the kids lean in close to the couple, with their heads tilted toward their parents.

6. AFTER THE SESSION

Today, most digital photographers take on postproduction work themselves. An upside to this is the amount of control this affords the photographer. However, there is a downside, as well: processing your image files can take a significant amount of time.

In this chapter, we'll look at some time-saving strategies for backing up, processing your images for proofing, and making image enhancements for the final prints.

BACK UP YOUR IMAGES

There a variety of ways you can archive your images, but the goal of each method is the same: to keep your digital image files safe from destruction. Once the session is complete, immediately download your images to a secure hard drive. Most photographers start with keeping images on their computer but soon realize they will need much more storage capacity than their computer provides. The simplest and fastest solution is to buy an external hard drive for image storage.

How much storage do you need? Calculate the amount of space required to store images from a typical session, then multiply that figure by the number of sessions you expect to shoot in a year's time. Add 10 to 15 percent more storage space to account for personal work and unexpected sessions, and you should have a basic idea of how much storage space you'll require.

For maximum security, consider buying a new hard drive at the beginning of each year and storing the year's work on a new hard drive. (*Note:* Large portrait studios will need high-capacity storage devices and a secure network system.)

Another storage option is a "cloud" system. Today, there are several companies that offer online storage of data to remote sites. The advantage to this is that you don't have to worry about loss of images due to fire or theft, as everything is backed up outside of your location. The drawbacks of using this system are cost and the need to keep copies of your image files in-house, as a "cloud" system is only accessible via the Internet.

Web-site-based storage is yet another option. There are many companies that offer online image storage, and many of these companies allow image ordering. Therefore, once you upload your images, your clients can

Tips for Backing Up

- Immediately download the images to your storage device after your session.
- Have two to three methods for backing up your images. An external hard drive and DVDs is one method.
- Name or label your client files in a way that allows fast and easy access to archived files. One method is to file the images by the client's last name and year the session was held.
- Never erase or format your camera's media cards until your client's images are safely stored in at least two locations.

view their images and order prints right from the host's site, saving you, the photographer, time and money in the reorder process.

POSTPRODUCTION BASICS

Using Adobe Lightroom or Apple Aperture makes it easy to process your images and back up your files at the same time. The techniques that are presented below are specific to Adobe Lightroom, but the process is similar in Aperture.

Simply download your images directly from your card reader into Lightroom. Be sure to check that you want the images imported and copied into a new archive file. Lightroom will then make copies of your JPEG and RAW files and store them in the archive file, while simultaneously importing the RAW files into Lightroom for editing.

With these steps complete, it is time to edit the images. Using the Library mode, you can select the images to be processed using the "pick" key (the "P" key). Note that you can sort the images using star ratings or assign color labels to your image, then select specific groups (say, images with four or five stars) for editing.

The next step is to go into the Develop mode and adjust the images' exposure, contrast, color saturation, and more. If you find yourself using the same adjustments frequently, you can create a preset and use it each time you process. *(Note:* Select presets are available by default. You can use them to apply quick and easy, high-impact changes to your images.) Adobe offers seminars, workshops, and online support that you can and should rely on to get the most out of this powerful program. However, you may find that the Help files offer all the assistance you need to make common improvements to your images.

After making your image adjustments in Lightroom, export the images into a new file in your client's archive folder. Here you will be able to select the file format you'll need for your intended output. For quick processing, try exporting the files as JPEGs. You can always go back to the processed file and save a copy as a PSD or TIFF if need be.

PROCESSING YOUR IMAGES FOR PROOFING

Let's face it: the better your subjects feel about their appearance in their images, the bigger your sales. It is a good idea, therefore, to present your clients with images that are as close to finished as possible when it comes time for the viewing session.

Once the images have been corrected and adjusted in Lightroom, I batch process them in Photoshop to enhance the subjects' skin tones.

A batch process can be used to apply a series of actions (e.g., enhancements) to a group of images at the click of a button. (Actions are a series of automated commands used to process one or more image files.) The

Retouching is Essential

A professional should never display an unretouched image or let an unfinished portrait leave their studio (the only exception to this would be a photographer who shoots film and has developed a distinct style of natural photography).

Good retouching—that is, enhancements that are not evident in the final print and make the subject look his or her very best—is imperative to your success. Poor retouching can destroy an image and ruin your professional reputation.

actions you include in your batch process depend on your artistic vision. For instance, you may want to select your Lightroom or Aperture output folder containing color corrected images and have a batch process lightly retouch the skin, vignette, or resize every image, saving the processed images to a new folder. Batch processing the images to soften the skin and darken the edges will help to give the images a finished, professional look.

PRESENTING THE IMAGES TO YOUR CLIENTS

There are several ways you can present your images to your clients. Online proofing and sales is a popular option for many photographers. However, it simply isn't as lucrative an option as meeting with clients face to face to present their images. The same is true of providing clients CDs/DVDs or printed proofs of the images and letting them view their images at home. One way to increase your sales when proofing images online is to make the images available for viewing for only a short period of time and to charge an additional fee for re-posting or keeping the images online longer. You could also use an online proofing service like www.pictage.com, www.smugmug.com, or www.zenfolio.com, which allows clients to place their print and product orders right on the web site.

Most photographers have found that hosting a sales session is the most successful and lucrative approach to proofing, as you can discuss the images, the products you offer, and other important details with your clients.

"Jennifer has been doing my family's photos for years. I never knew how much they would mean to me. Since the passing of my husband, I feel blessed to have those memories."—*Traci J.*

The Sales Session. During your pre-session consultation or the portrait session itself, set an appointment for your client to meet with you to review their images. The location for your sales session will depend on your business. Those with a studio or storefront can meet the client there. Photographers who operate a studio in their homes should plan to hold the session in an area that is comfortable and well prepared for presenting the images. On the other hand, you can always offer to conduct the session at the client's home.

No matter the venue for the session, you'll find that showing the images on a large television or projecting the images onto a wall will increase your odds of selling large, wall-sized prints. You might also consider creating a DVD slide show of the images and showing them on a large computer screen. If, for whatever reason, you do not have access to a large-screen TV, projector, or monitor, consider presenting framed sample prints in various sizes.

Not every photographer is comfortable presenting their images to clients. If this is the case for you, consider hiring a sales-savvy individual to show your images. Selling is an art, and your profits (and ultimately, your business) depend on your success.

A sales session should be relaxed and enjoyable. Request that your clients not bring small children to the session. Plan on having adequate time

to enjoy viewing the images. Having samples of albums, products, and finishes for images on hand will help you maximize your sales.

The goal of the sales session, of course, is to get your clients' orders placed during the meeting. One of the best ways to make this happen is to offer lower prices during the sales session and establish a rate increase for post-session orders. If your client cannot decide just what they want to order or wants to check with a spouse, family member, or friend before finalizing their order, you can always take a deposit that will allow them to lock in the lower product prices.

PROCESSING YOUR RAW FILES AND RETOUCHING THE FINAL PRINTS

Once the proofing session has been conducted and your clients have selected the poses they'd like to order, you'll need to process your RAW files and conduct some final retouching/enhancements. The following steps provide a basic outline for how this is done.

1. We use Lightroom or Aperture to apply copyright information on every image and carry out some basic image enhancements (e.g., color correction, cropping and straightening, sharpening and noise reduction, and grayscale conversion). These are completely non-destructive editing programs; the enhancements/changes you make are stored in metadata as a series of instructions, so your files are never compromised. This allows you to revert to the original file or any stage in the image-enhancement process.

Lightroom's Direct Positive preset was used to punch up the color, saturation, and vibrance in this image.

Slide Shows

Slide shows are a great tool for presenting your images to clients. These can be quickly and easily created using software like ProSelect (www.timeexposure.com), or you can create them on your own using Photoshop.

Music is an important part of a slide show, as it helps to set the desired emotional tone. You can purchase royalty-free music to enhance your presentation from www.triplescoopmusic.com or www.animoto.com.

PROFESSIONAL TIPS FROM TONY CORBELL

This section, courtesy of Tony Corbell, will show you how to create an action and batch process to run Nik Software's Color Efex Pro 3.0 enhancements on your images. Note that you can also create actions and batch processes to automatically process images using Photoshop or third-party plug-ins and filters.

CREATING AN ACTION

1. Open an image in Photoshop.
2. Open the Actions tab by clicking on Window>Actions.
3. Click the Create New Action icon at the bottom on the Actions tab, and assign a name for your action.
4. Click on the record button to begin recording your action.
5. Select the desired Color Efex Pro 3.0 filter. For example:

    a. Click Filter>Nik Software>Color Efex Pro 3.0 to bring up the interface.
    b. Click on the appropriate filter in the Color Efex Pro 3.0 interface and click OK.
    c. Wait for the filter to process the image and apply the effect.

6. Click the stop button.
7. Save the file and close it.

Your action is now complete and can be viewed in the Actions tab.

SETTING UP THE BATCH PROCESS

To batch process a folder of images, navigate to the File>Automate menu and select Batch. Before beginning this process, it is recommended that you create a new folder on your desktop labeled with the action name and the word "Processed" (e.g., "Polarization Processed"). This folder will contain all of the images once the action has been applied to them.

To start the batch process, follow these steps:

1. Ensure that the action that was created earlier appears in the Action pull-down menu. If it is not listed, click on the pull-down menu and select the correct action.
2. Under Source, select Folder, then click Choose. Navigate to the folder that contains all of the images that you want to apply the batch process to.
3. Under Destination, select Folder. Click Choose and navigate to the folder that was created on your desktop earlier (e.g., the Polarization Processed folder).
4. Click OK.

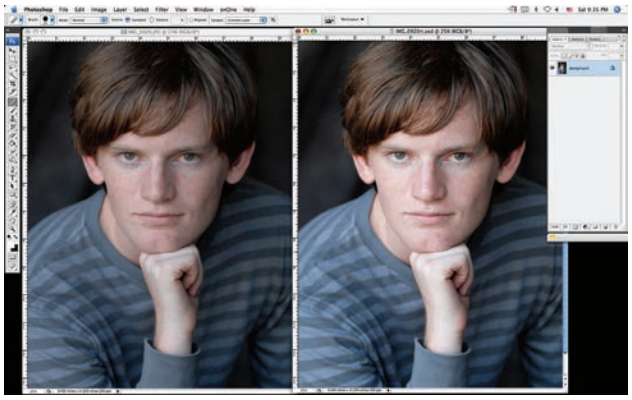
The batch process will now begin and the action will be applied to all of the images in the folder. The enhanced file will be saved to the Processed folder on the desktop. (*Note:* When using Color Efex Pro 3.0 in a batch process—or actions—the filter effect will not be applied to a separate layer. To apply Color Efex Pro 3.0 to a separate layer, while recording the action, duplicate the layer prior to applying the Color Efex Pro 3.0 filter. This will ensure that the batch process will include a new filtered layer for each image.)

To batch process from Bridge, open the file to be processed, select all the images, click on Tools, then Photoshop and select Batch. Under 'set' select the folder your action is in, then select the action you want to run. Make sure to select the Choose option and select the folder the images should be saved to. You can rename the images at this time if desired.

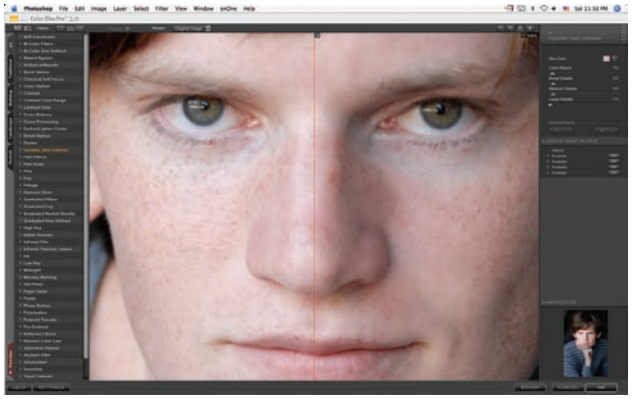
2. When these steps are complete, we save the processed files in the JPEG format and resize the images as required to fill the client's order. We always save the RAW (original) files as well so that we can go back later and process or retouch the file if the need arises.
3. Once you've completed your work in Lightroom or Aperture, all you should have to do is apply a batch process to soften the skin and vignette the edges. Here's how it's done.

    a. Open the image in Photoshop and first brighten and add contrast.
    b. Using the Healing Brush to remove blemishes, wrinkles, and undereye marks.
    c. Now soften the skin with a third-party plug-in or filter (e.g., Nik Software Color Efex Pro's Dynamic Skin Softener filter).
    d. At this point, you could also use Nik Software's Tonal Contrast to smooth out the skin and add a warm tone.
    e. To finish the image, vignette the edges. Kevin Kubota's Artistic Action II, Edge Burner was used to produce the final image in the series on the facing page.

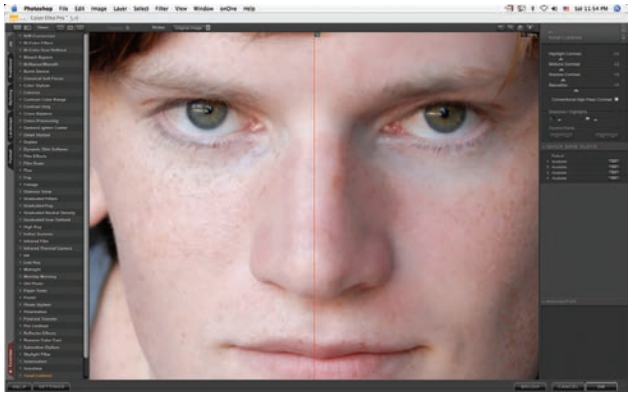
Lightroom was used to increase the contrast and brighten up this black & white image.



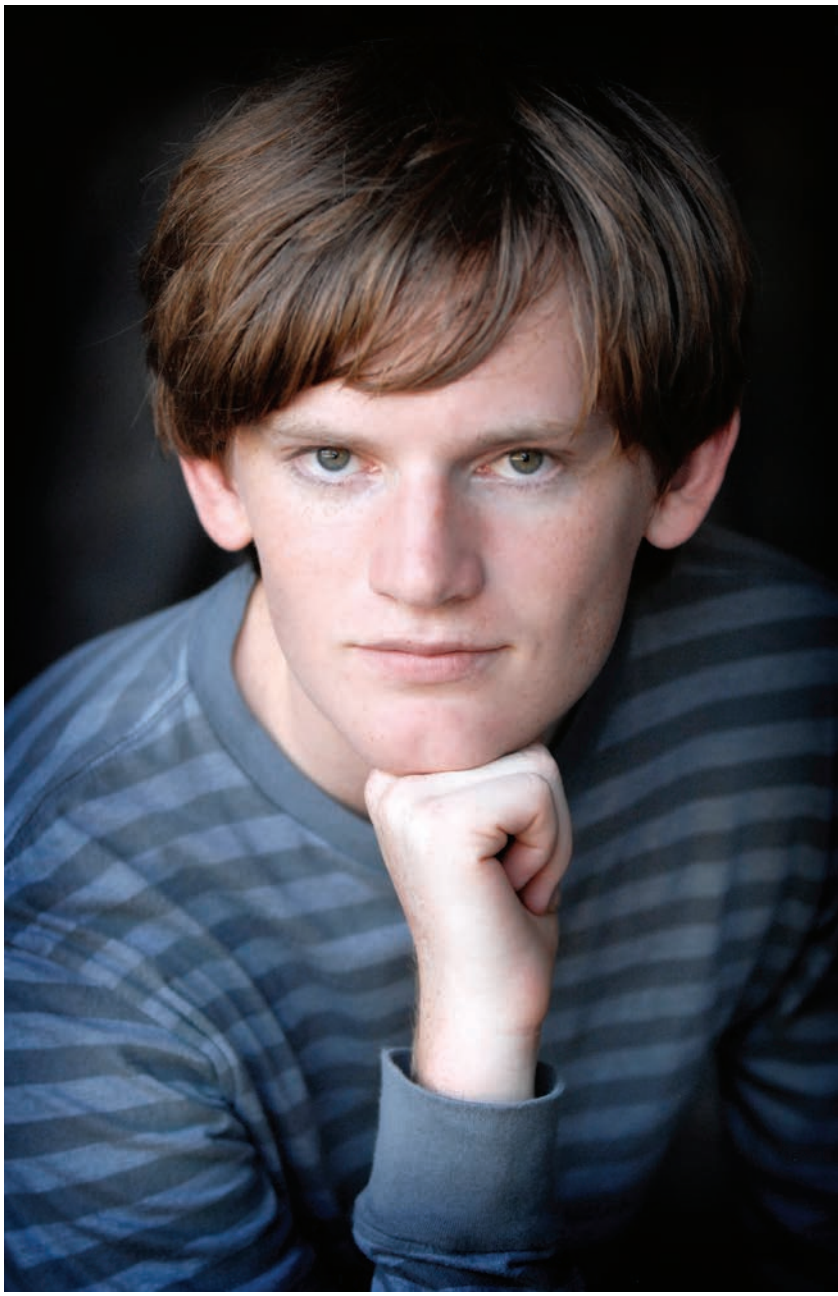
First, the image is opened in Photoshop, where brightness levels and contrast are adjusted.



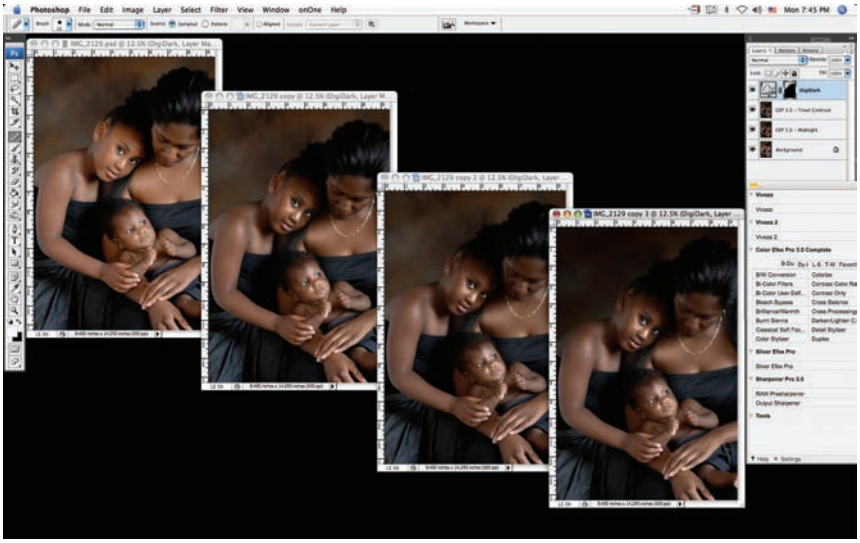
This screen shot shows the Nik Software Color Efex Pro 3.0's Dynamic Skin Softner filter in use.



This screen shot shows the application of Nik Software's Tonal Contrast filter.



Here is the final image.



Finishing this portrait was simple. First, Nik Software's Midnight filter was applied, then the Tonal Contrast filter was used to add warmth. Finally, Kevin Kubota's Smokeless Burn action was used to selectively darken areas of the image. The final image was converted to black & white using Nik Software's Silver Efex Pro.

Filters and the Final Image

One of the best and easiest ways to enhance your final images is to use filters from Nik Software (www.niksoftware.com). The company offers a wide variety of software solutions that can be used to retouch your images or add artistic effects. You can find software from other manufacturers at www.portraitprofessional.com, www.dxo.com, www.truview.com, and similar web sites.

These three images were enhanced using presets installed in Adobe Lightroom. **Top**—The Direct Positive preset was used, then the image was sharpened and a vignette was added. **Center**—This image shows the effect achieved using the High Contrast preset. **Bottom**—The Sepia preset was used to enhance this image.

7. ADVANCED IMAGE EDITING

The techniques described in the previous chapter are all you'll need to retouch and enhance most of your subjects' portraits. However, there are times when you'll find that there's one image that simply won't be made client-ready by using the batch processes used to finish the balance of the images from the session. In this chapter, I've provided some photos and techniques that show how some bigger portrait problems can be addressed.

For More Information . . .

All professional portrait photographers will want to learn more in-depth methods and techniques for retouching and enhancing their images. A few excellent resources for this are:

- www.kelbytraining.com
- www.photoshopdaily.com
- www.eddietapp.com
- http://divitalephotography.blogspot.com
- www.Dummies.com/Photoshop
- www.graphic-design.com/Photoshop

"Jennifer gets the capture, the moment, and the memories."

—Blake J., age 13

MORE RETOUCHING AND WHITENING TEETH

To improve the sample image (shown on page 86), I wanted to brighten up the faces and clean up the gray cast. Here's how it was done:

1. In Photoshop, I went to File>Automate>Nik Software and selected the Viveza filter.
2. I placed the control point on the main subject, expanded the selection to include all of the subject, and adjusted the amount of brightening. (Note that you can also use Viveza to correct color and add warmth.)
3. Next, I created a new layer and named it Healing Brush. I used the Healing Brush to remove small blemishes and lines.
4. Next, I decided to whiten the teeth. I created two layers and made the adjustments on the top layer (you can select Layer>Merge Layers if you need to lower or change the opacity of the white teeth layer).

   There are two approaches you can use to whiten the teeth:

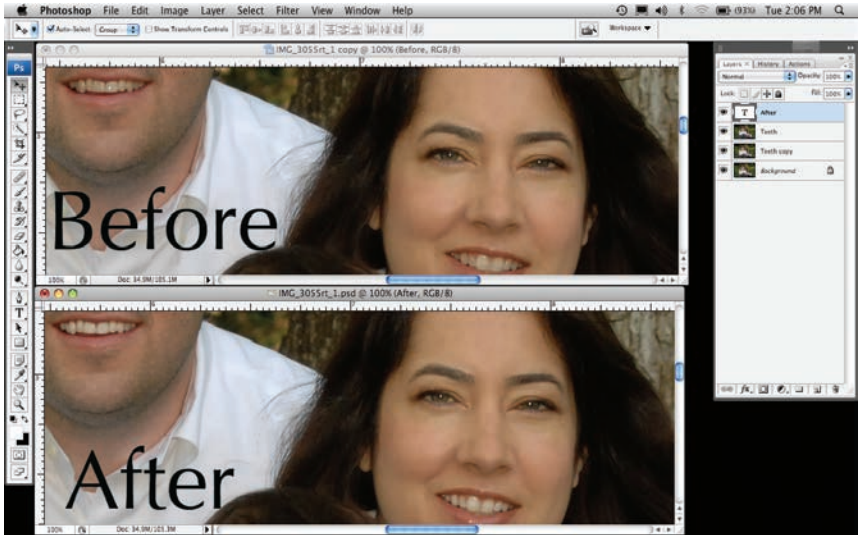
Top—This screen shot shows the Viveza filter interface. **Center**—This screen shot shows the creation of a separate Photoshop layer, to which the teeth whitening will be applied. **Bottom**—In this screen shot, you can see each step that was taken to retouch the image.

Tips for Success

- Subscribe to blogs and web sites to stay current on news about the latest Photoshop tools and techniques.
- Use third-party plug-ins and filters to speed up repetitive steps in Photoshop. A skin softening/enhancement filter is a must for every portrait photographer.
- Always attempt to get the best exposure, lighting, posing, and setting when capturing the image. Don't rely on Photoshop to fix problems that can be resolved during the portrait session.

a. You can use the Dodge tool set at an opacity of 7–10%.
b. You can use the Paintbrush set to an opacity of about 7–10% and paint the teeth white. *(Note:* Whether you use method A or B, you can use a layer mask to clean up any white you may have accidentally painted onto the lips or gums. The Layer Mask icon can be found at the bottom of the Layer palette and appears as a rectangle with a circle in the middle. Click on the top white teeth layer, click the Layer Mask icon, and select the Paintbrush tool, making sure it is set to black. Using 100% opacity, paint back any areas covered with the white or that were accidentally dodged using the Dodge tool. Once you are done, zoom out and survey the results. If the teeth are too white, lower the opacity of that layer until they look natural. You will need to merge the top white teeth layer with the bottom white teeth layer before moving on.)

5. This portrait could be further improved by whitening the eyes. I completed the task using the process I employed to whiten the teeth. (When doing this, remember to work with two layers so you can change the opacity if necessary.)
6. I finished the image by softening the skin, then used Nik Software's Tonal Contrast filter to enhance the color.



Here, another couple's teeth were whitened using the Paintbrush method.

HEAD SWAPPING

In a portrait of a large family, it's not uncommon to have an image in which everyone looks great—except for the one subject who has their eyes closed, is looking away, or has a bad expression. Fortunately, when working digitally, we can easily correct this problem.

1. Check the size of the image with the flaw, then crop the image with the good expression so that it is about the same size as the area it will be used to replace. This does not have to be exact, as you can transform the size of the face to fit exactly.
2. Drag the replacement element onto the good image. In the Layers palette, lower the opacity of the layer containing the new image element so you can see both images at the same time.
3. Using the Transform tool, rotate the cropped image until it fits the intended area. You can also use this tool to scale the image to match perfectly with the finished image. (You can use the ears as a guide for determining the appropriate size.)
4. Erase the portion of the cropped image you don't need.
5. Click on and off of the cropped layer to check for stray areas that were not erased. Make sure you have a clean area around the new face. Also, make sure the eye and mouth sizes perfectly match up.

Left—Both images of this family are fairly good, but the image with more space around the family will be easier to crop into a large wall portrait. **Right**—In the preferred image, most of the family has a pleasant expression, but the baby doesn't appear as happy as the others. We can take her expression from the second image and apply it to the better portrait.

Left—Ensuring the second image is about the same size as the original will make the head swapping easier. **Right**—The image of the baby's face was placed upon the finished image and moved the appropriate position.

Left—Edit>Free Transform was selected, and the new face was rotated to match its position in the original/bottom image. **Right**—Slight adjustments were made to ensure that the baby's head was a perfect match for the image.

Using the Eraser tool, excess areas of the top layer were removed. With this accomplished, adjust the layer opacity of the top layer to 100% and make sure the head swap matches perfectly.

Top—The fence in the original background was distracting and compromised the overall portrait quality. **Bottom**—In this example, the Smokeless Burn action was used at several different opacities to create a natural progression from the "burned" areas to the normal image areas.

REMOVING LARGE DISTRACTING ELEMENTS

The fence that appeared in the background of the original photograph detracted from the overall image quality. This was an easy fix.

1. To begin improving this image, I selected the Clone tool and used it to remove/disguise unwanted elements. In this case, I'd planned to apply a heavy vignette to the final image; therefore, retouching the background didn't require any detailed, time-consuming retouching.
2. Next, I selected the Patch tool, created a selection, and moved that selection over an area that was similar in texture and pattern to the area to be repaired/replaced. *(Note:* When using the Patch tool to do this kind of work, you may need to do a little clean-up with the Clone Stamp tool or Healing Brush.)
3. To camouflage the fence in the background, I used Kevin Kubota's Smokeless Burn action (found in Artistic Actions Vol. II). You can also use the Burn tool in Photoshop to create the effect.

NOT AN IDEAL SITUATION

What do you do when you take a family to a beautiful location only to find there are lots of other people enjoying the location too? What happens when the weather isn't perfect? There's no need to reschedule the session. Both of these problems can be eliminated in Photoshop.

Top—Here the family is placed with the people in the background to the edge of the main subject area. I was able to easily remove the unwanted image elements, without having to retouch around the subjects. **Bottom**—Instead of re-shooting a session when the sunset is not ideal, take the best image you can at the location and enhance it in Photoshop. The key is to make the enhancement pleasing and realistic.

Close-ups like these are a favorite with parents when it comes to A Day in the Life books.

8. A DAY IN THE LIFE SESSIONS

As a portrait photographer, you have a special place in the lives of the families you photograph. You have the opportunity to see and experience parts of your clients' lives that other service providers do not—from weddings, to births, to documenting milestones, and, at times, even being there to photograph a family member at the end of his or her life.

Conducting special A Day in the Life sessions will allow you to get an inside look at the family's life, allowing you to capture and preserve the everyday moments of family life that seem to fly by too quickly. By spending many hours with your clients, in their home, you can capture the daily routine—from breakfast, to playtime, to dinner time, to the bedtime rituals—and capture the ambience of their home. With the meaningful moments you capture, you can put together an album that chronicles the family's relationship and will be cherished long after the children are grown and have moved out on their own.

A Day in the Life sessions are not only special to the family; they can also be beneficial you. Your clients will want to show their cherished book to their friends and families and—unlike a wall portrait—your clients can carry them in a purse or bag and show them to a wider audience. When your clients share their excitement over their session with others, you'll get many new referrals.

BOOKING THE SESSION

It is a good idea to try to sell your client's A Day in the Life session as an add-on when you book their portrait session. Depending upon how you

The images from your client's A Day in the Life session will end up in a book, so be sure to photograph a strong graphic element that will make a good cover shot.

jennifer jg george
photography
A Day in Our Lives ...
A Day in our Lives
Capture a day in the life of your family with a one of a kind artistic high quality 40 page coffee table book filled with images by International award-winning photographer and book author Jennifer George.
Each book contains portraits as well as everyday life and interests of each member of your family, capturing so much more than your beautiful family portrait hanging on your wall.
Call today for information, as bookings for these sessions is limited!
Jennifer George Photography
858.259.2533
jennifergeorgephotography.com

Storytelling images like these make great candidates for your client's A Day in the Life book.

structure the price for the special session, you may be able to offer the service to your clients without adding a lot to the bill.

If you will be creating portraits at your client's home, you can consider offering to add A Day in the Life coverage for a special fee—say, for half the price of your usual location session fee. Since you will be traveling to the location for the regular portrait session, you can easily extend your time there and create many more images to sell to the client. These sessions are time-consuming, both during and after the shoot. Charging a half-price location fee may not provide enough compensation, so you may want to add a fee for the postproduction work, design of the album, and the printing costs—payable at various stages of the process. This will allow you to divide the fee for the service into manageable sums for the client.

There are hundreds of companies that produce beautiful coffee-table style books that you can choose from for your clients' albums. To ensure that your book does not look like something your clients can assemble themselves at one of the consumer-targeted online photo labs, you may want to choose an album from a company that caters to professional photographers. Asukabook (www.asukabook.com) and other similar providers feature artful, high-quality albums at a wide variety of sizes and price points. Our A Day in the Life albums are typically 10x10 inches, but you may find that a smaller or larger format works better for your clientele.

When marketing this type of session, look to auctions and fund-raisers that cater to a family audience. Offer the whole package or just the session for the auction. You can display individual images as well as a book for the guests to view.

STRUCTURING THE SESSION

During the pre-session consultation with your clients, find out what needs to be captured. Create a time line of activities and shots you want to capture before you arrive for the session. Some will want to follow a basic theme that shows the family's main activity, and some families will simply want you to follow them around while they do the normal routine of the day. Other clients will want you to showcase each child separately with their hobbies, activities, and family members.

Get in on the action. Capture your subjects being who they are—or who they aspire to be. Portraits like these help to document the personality of your subject at this particular stage of life.

The daily routine of caring for little ones is a great theme to incorporate in a family's A Day in the Life book. Try to capture spontaneous, playful moments by standing back and letting your subjects be themselves.

An A Day in the Life session does not have to be an eight- to twelve-hour day. The session can be loosely scripted to have the important elements of a family's life captured in about four hours. Most families are not used to having someone photograph them for hours on end and will tire of the session within a few hours. Depending upon what is important to the family, you can structure the day to start early, with images of the kids getting ready for school, having breakfast, playing outside, or whatever they do. You can also opt to start later in the day and capture the child doing homework, the family having dinner, and the child's bedtime.

If you include a portrait session as part of the A Day in the Life session, you will have more images to sell, including images for wall portraits or holiday cards. Photograph each individual family member, the mom and dad together, and the parents with each child. Finally, photograph the entire family. Capturing a variety of images will help to build your sales.

For younger children, scheduling a morning session may be best. If the kids are preschoolers or younger, much of the activity will take place in the home. You can photograph them having breakfast, playing with mom and dad or their toys, taking a bath, and having a book read to them. You might also photograph them during nap time. Nap time also presents a good opportunity to take portraits of the parents and older siblings.

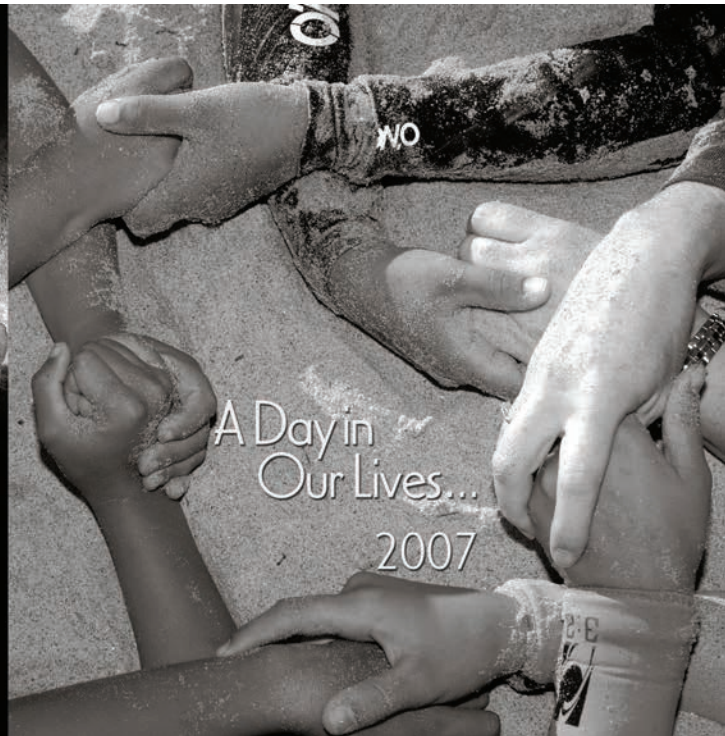
It will be up to you to keep the session moving forward; you'll need to ensure that the family is moving from one activity to the next. You may want to start with the portrait session and then move on to photographing the main activities. Spend time with each child, ask questions to find out about their favorite toy, activity, or hobby. The more you learn about the family, the more images you can capture, and the larger the book you can sell.

Blending Video with the Session. Today's cameras not only record still images; they can also record video. Consider adding a video component to your A Day in the Life sessions. Before the session, create a time line and script out elements and scenes you want to capture. Interviewing and recording the clients (especially the kids) talking will allow you to add an audio track that can be used with a slide show of the clients' images.

THEMES

If you have the opportunity to photograph families year after year, you may want to create a special theme book each year. If the family has a sport or hobby they do together, make that the theme of the book. Don't

Here you have two types of A Day in the Life books—a traditional book and a theme book. The top book, a traditional book, follows the family through the moments of their day. The theme book below focuses on the family's love of the beach and showcases images that feature the family surfing and playing together.



Capture the personality of your subjects when you create portraits for their A Day in the Life books.

Grandparents' books feature multiple generations of subjects and celebrate the family's bond. Be sure to capture a range of subject groupings and moods.

forget the precious small moments that the parents share with each child, such as reading books, working on homework, making dinner, or even doing chores together.

FAMILY AND GRANDPARENTS' BOOKS

What do you do when you have to create the perfect family portrait for the family but have dozens of wonderful additional photos from the session? Besides selling gift prints (framed images for the office and home), a family book is an excellent add-on item.

Whether you are working in the studio, at the client's home, or at another location, you can always capture more than just the family group shot for the wall portrait. Most portrait photographers already do "break outs"—photos of the husband and wife, the kids, and each individual alone. To create a family book, you will have to take it a step further and capture unique angles, poses, and images that show the relationship between family members.

Let the interpersonal relationships the family shares help you determine the image styles you'll create during the session. The family's unique relationship should also be considered when you select the design elements you will incorporate in the A Day in the Life family book. Your goal is to create a work of art that speaks to the client. Each design should be as unique as the family gathered in front of your lens.

SPECIALTY BOOKS

Books for special occasions are good products to sell to your clients. Always collect both husband and wife's e-mail and phone numbers. Then as special dates come up, such as Mother's and Father's Day, you can e-mail or call with the suggestion of creating a special gift.

The above images were created during an A Day in the Life session, with the resulting book given to a lucky mom on Mother's Day.

CAPTURING PRECIOUS MOMENTS: WHEN A FAMILY MEMBER IS ILL

There will be times as a family portrait photographer when the portrait session is not a celebration, but an opportunity to document memories of a loved one before it is too late. While this is a difficult time, it can be one of the most rewarding sessions a portrait photographer can do.

As Allie McKay of McKay Photography in El Dorado Hills states, "The hardest part for me was photographing my client with her daughter. First, I photographed them looking at the camera, then I moved toward more interactive images. It was really touching to see them laughing and touching and connecting. But when I got a glimpse of the daughter with tears in her eyes—for me it was more touching being a mother with a daughter. What a gift you can give them. Whether they survive the 'scare' or not,

Tips for Success

- Don't push. Don't call the family frequently to try to book the session. Give the prospective clients time.
- During the telephone consultation, let the prospective clients know you are comfortable working with them, and ask them what they want from the session.
- Be real, but don't talk about the illness around the children.
- Be relaxed, not artificial or overly happy.
- Do a variety of different poses. Try to capture each child alone with the parent.

An A Day in the Life session can be a blessing for a family who is dealing with the hardship of a child's illness. Be sure to capture the moments of joy the subjects feel when they gather in front of your camera to celebrate the bond they share.

PROFESSIONAL INSIGHTS FROM LORI NORDSTROM

Lori Nordstrom of www.nordstromphoto.com, has had many opportunities to work with children who are battling cancer. She states,

"The first time I went to photograph a group of kids with cancer (I was working with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society for our annual Little Angels calendar) I was so apprehensive. In my mind I was thinking, 'I photograph happy, healthy kids every day! How am I going to handle this?' What I found was that these kids should be treated just like any other child. They are loving and happy. Their parents have had to learn to trust others and accept help, which was a big lesson for me! They are thankful for every day that they are given together, and it's beautiful watching the interactions between family members." Lori goes on to tell the story of the impact these sessions can make: "In the early stages of me doing this project (probably 2002), I got a call to go to the home of a little boy who was dying. He couldn't get to the studio and didn't have much time. The morning came when I was supposed to visit and photograph this boy. I had a flat tire when I went out to the car. I had left my own son sick in his room. I went back in the house and called the mother of the little boy with cancer and told her I would have to re-schedule. I had a 'sick child' and a flat tire. You can imagine what happened. I called to reschedule the appointment with this boy, and he had died. We all have only moments. There is no 'time management.' Time is a tool for the life we have been given. How will you manage your life?

This event has forever changed how I approach these sessions and how I view my clients. Tomorrow is no guarantee. How will you remember today?"

these images will be very valuable to them and show them how much they love each other."

An A Day in the Life session can be a blessing for a family struggling with a serious illness. Those little moments of being at home, carrying out their normal daily routines with their loved one is what they want to remember.

You can never know the importance your photos may have to a family down the line. This grandfather was photographed with his wife, children, and grandchildren just months before he passed away. His family is grateful to have touching images of him.

...and the greatest of these is love

1 Corinthians 13:13

Remembering a Loved One

An A Day in the Life session can be a wonderful tool to help a family remember precious times with a loved one who has since departed. We've found that our clients have been grateful that they took advantage of our special sessions. Here are some comments from our clients about their experience:

> Jennifer's A Day in the Life book gave us a moment in time. We'll never have that time again. Mark passed away nine months after that day. Now, when I look at the book, I remember every picture that was taken, every part of the day, the smiles, the closeness, the holding of hands, the dinner, the basketball, the sweeping of the driveway, the motorcycles, the motor home, all of it. We have that now. We have those memories of spending a precious day with each other. What a beautiful gift that day and those pictures have given us.—Teresa H.
>
> It was relaxing. I treasured the moments we had together. It felt good to be important for the day and to know Jennifer cared about what our family was like.—David (12), age 13 when his dad, Mark, passed away.
>
> I liked the way the day was centered around our family. It made me feel special.—Dana (13), age 14 when her dad, Mark, passed away.

9. PHOTOGRAPHING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

PREPARATION IS KEY

When it comes to working with children with special needs, you'll need to rely on information and approaches that lie outside of the realm of your everyday portrait experience. Without special training and education, this

Facing page and top right—In a few moments' time, you can capture images with an entirely different mood. Though the pose was the same in both of these images, turning the camera and zooming in on the subjects to capture the pensive child's expression allowed me to create another great portrait for the family to order. **Bottom right**—Capturing the joy in the family's interaction is easy when you take the time to get to know your clients and make them comfortable in front of your camera.

Facing page—After several miscarriages and a difficult birth, Bev was finally blessed with a son, Zack. Born with cerebral palsy, nothing can stop Zack. He is a wonderful young man with a lot of character and a special love of golf. Photographing Zack in a natural light studio allowed for as natural a look as possible. With Zack's zest for life and love for his mom, the session was a delightful event. **Above**—There is a special bond between the mom and the child with special needs—and that bond continues as the child grows into adulthood. Photographing this mom with her almost-adult son was accomplished in a natural light studio. I ensured that the atmosphere was relaxed, talked and acted playfully with the subjects, and interacted constantly with the son. Explaining what you are doing helps to put the subjects at ease.

type of session can be difficult. There are good resources that will help you develop the skills and knowledge base you need to succeed—see Karen Dórame's book, *Photographing Children with Special Needs: A Complete Guide for Professional Portrait Photographers* (Amherst Media, 2003) and visit www.specialkidsphotography.com, which offers a downloadable form for interviewing the family and photo tips for photographing children with special needs.

When preparing for the session, take the time to thoroughly interview the parent. Be sure to ask about the child's difficulties, fears, and previous experiences.

PROFESSIONAL INSIGHTS FROM LUCI DUMAS

As a photographer who has had the opportunity to work with special children, Luci Dumas (www.lucidumas.com) has wonderful suggestions and knowledge to share. She says:

"One key to working with kids with special needs is to understand children in general and their developmental stages. Having a working knowledge of children from birth through the teenage years and knowing how to successfully photograph them at each distinct stage will guide you in working with a special needs child. The more you know about the physical, mental, and emotional development of children, the better you will be with those who are on a less linear path.

Ask the parents what the developmental level of the child is and use that knowledge to decide how to work with him or her. Language skills, motor development, and physical limitations are all factors when deciding where and how to create images that show who the child is, not what they are lacking.

Another important thing to keep in mind is that this precious child is a complete soul and your job is to reveal this with your artist's eye and heart. Allow a few hours for a session if possible in case breaks are necessary. However, when photographing, you'll need to be geared up to work very fast, as the child might only give you brief moments where you see the spark in their eyes. Stay centered and alert so that you can see those moments when the child reveals themselves to you. Having abundant energy, attention, and creativity will give you some very special images. Arrive rested and ready to be patient and positive.

I photographed a beautiful little girl with Tay-Sachs disease whose actual age was about 2½. What happens with this illness is that they go backward and lose the progress they have made physically. She had the strength, language, and motor skills of a 4- or 5-month-old, so I planned the setup accordingly. A 4-month-old can't sit up but has neck strength. They can see across a room and can smile when stimulated. I put her in a child's chair that reclined slightly and put a great deal of support on each side of her head so that she looked more her age but was supported. I then used the same noises, facial expressions, and toys that would interest a 4-month-old subject. I also had her parents hold her in their arms and cuddle her as I would with a baby so that they supported her head with their hands and chest, looking down at her with tenderness. They were so happy with the images and have expressed how much comfort they receive from the portraits now that she is no longer with them. It was an honor to photograph this angel.

Look for the gift the child has to give you and realize the tremendous gift you are giving this family. They will be grateful for your talents and vision, and you will be blessed in return."

Luci Dumas' subject was full of energy and quite the supermodel. The most challenging aspect of the session was balancing her exuberance with her the more serious personality of her twin brother (not shown).

Loving Twin Sisters by Kim Treffinger (www.treffingerstudio.com). These 7-year-old twins were born prematurely and required intensive care. Katie experienced a hospital accident that left her severely brain damaged. At the client's home, Kim created a fluffy nest of pillows covered in pink tulle, which were positioned by a glass door. She used a large silver Larsen reflector for fill. The session was very exciting for the girls, which made it exceptionally exciting for Kim. Katie was having serious health challenges, so this portrait was extremely important to the family. The ethereal effects were added using Corel Painter.

Tips for Success

- Establishing a comfortable and relaxed environment is critical for a successful session. Photograph the subject in their home when possible.
- Photograph at the best time of day for that child.
- Flash can be scary and disruptive. Use natural light as much as possible.
- Get down to the child's level when talking to them.
- Be happy, laugh, talk, and connect with the child.
- Use a quiet voice and soothing words.

10. MARKETING FAMILY PORTRAITURE

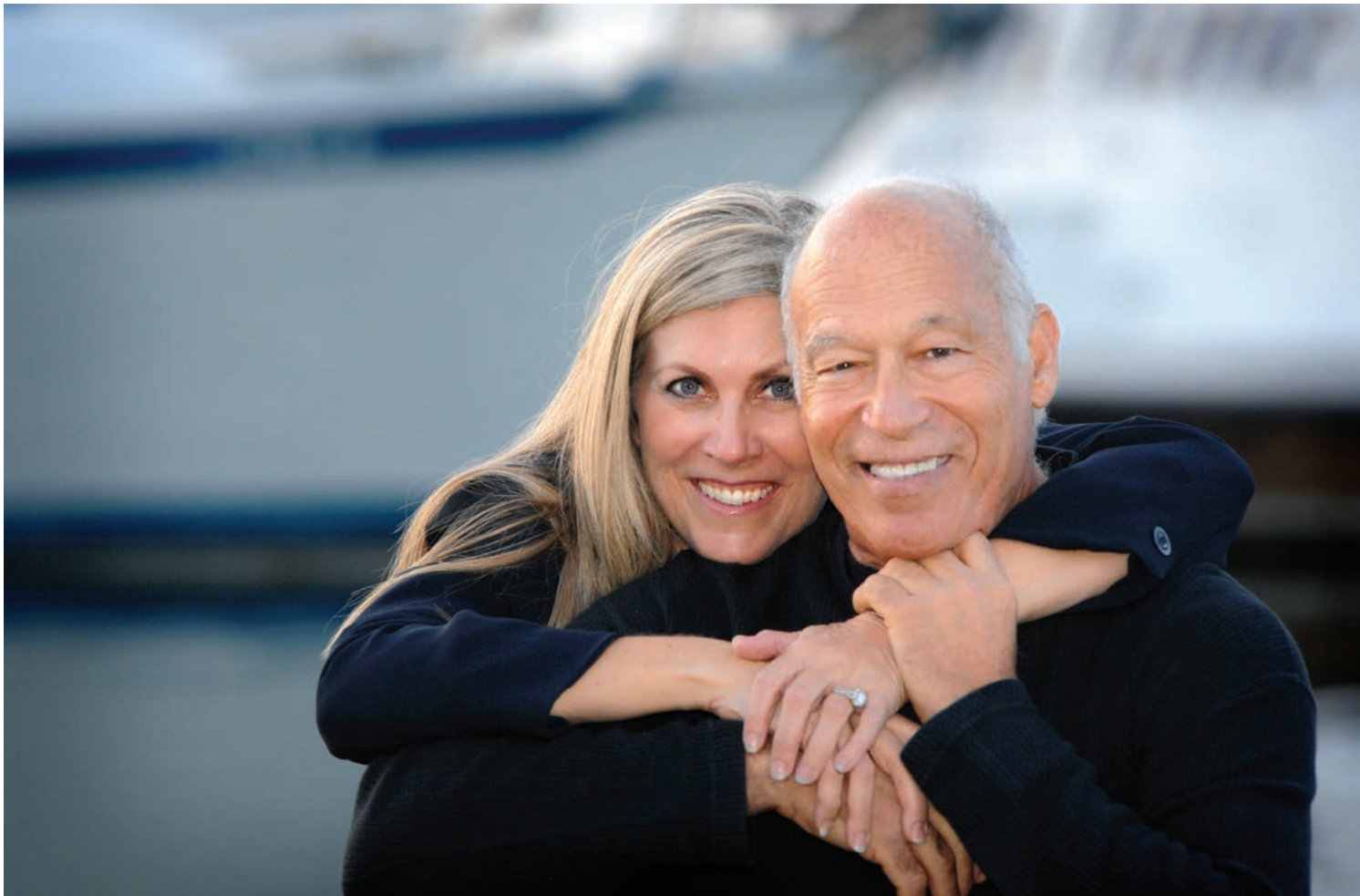
The advent of digital photography and the ease of processing images have convinced droves of camera enthusiasts to try their hand at portrait photography—meaning there are more family photographers than ever vying for clients' business. Photographers today face the daunting task of getting noticed in the sea of thousands of photographers out there. In this sink-or-swim environment, traditional modes of acquiring clients may no longer work. Photographers have to do much more than simply place an advertisement in the local paper and Yellow Pages or send out postcards to residents in nearby zip codes.

So, how do you get noticed? There are two important components to ensuring your success in today's market: you must develop your brand and be imaginative when it comes to marketing.

Facing page—Not all great family photos need to be posed. Here, the little boys were walking up to look directly into the lens of the camera. Their mother asked them to stop, but I asked them to keep coming. The result is an image that perfectly depicts the family and their dynamics. **Below**—This beautiful shot captures the love between this couple. Using some flash fill and a shallow depth of field helped the couple stand out from the subtle background. This image was taken with a Nikon D2X. The exposure was f/4.5 at 1/250 and ISO 400. I used a 70–200mm f/2.8 lens set at 200mm.

BRANDING

Seth Godin defines branding as a "set of expectations, memories, stories, and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision



to choose one product or service over another." A photographer needs to create a unique style and feel to their images—one that appeals to the client demographic they want to target.

In chapter 1, I outlined the importance of selling clients on the portrait experience. To be successful, you must create a brand that speaks to your prospective and current client base. Your branding should be evident in and reinforced by every aspect of your business—from your printed materials to your interior design, to the way your employees dress and interact with your clients.

"Jennifer's gift of photography is apparent in all of our family photos."—*Traci J.*

Branding your photography distinguishes it from others' work. It also creates a connection between your imagery and the portrait experience the clients expect to have. If you wanted to brand your photography as hip, young, and happy, you would choose colors, font styles, poses, and lighting styles that support that concept. You would follow through with your web site, business cards, social media, studio, and more importantly, your attitude, attire, and actions when you are with the client—and the images you created would have that stylish, youthful feel. If all of these elements are not in harmony, the clients will not have the expected experience or will not receive the product they expect and will be disappointed.

STAYING ON TOP OF TRENDS

To survive in this constantly changing market, you will have to find your niche and a way to promote it that stands out. Doing extensive research on upcoming trends and changes in consumer buying will help you to decide on which direction to take your family portrait business. It is difficult for anyone to predict where portrait photography will be in 10 years; however, it is safe to assume that families will continue to take a least one family portrait in their lifetime, and most parents will have several portraits made of their children.

To create a brand that will help your business thrive, take a close look at the successful businesses in your area. Do not limit your search to photography studios; study all types of businesses that are thriving. Find out their market, who shops and purchases from them, and how they acquire their clients and bring in business.

Know your business well, talk to other photographers in the industry, and attend workshops on marketing and business. Once you have a good idea of what will work in your area, develop a brand that suits your talent and desire. Hiring a branding company is the ideal situation, but for those who don't have the funds to do this, there are other ways to create your brand. Contact the local universities, colleges, and junior colleges to have a marketing class take on your business as a project. Show your ideas to friends and family members and ask them for honest feedback. If you are struggling to find a branding concept that suits you, start with labeling

your style. Is your photography traditional, contemporary, unique, stylish, dramatic, hip, natural, relaxed, or unstructured? Compile your top 20 images, show them to several people from different backgrounds, and ask them to describe your images. Don't tell them what you want to hear; let them tell you in a few words what the images say to them. Take the similar labels from several people and begin to develop wording that expresses their vision of your photography.

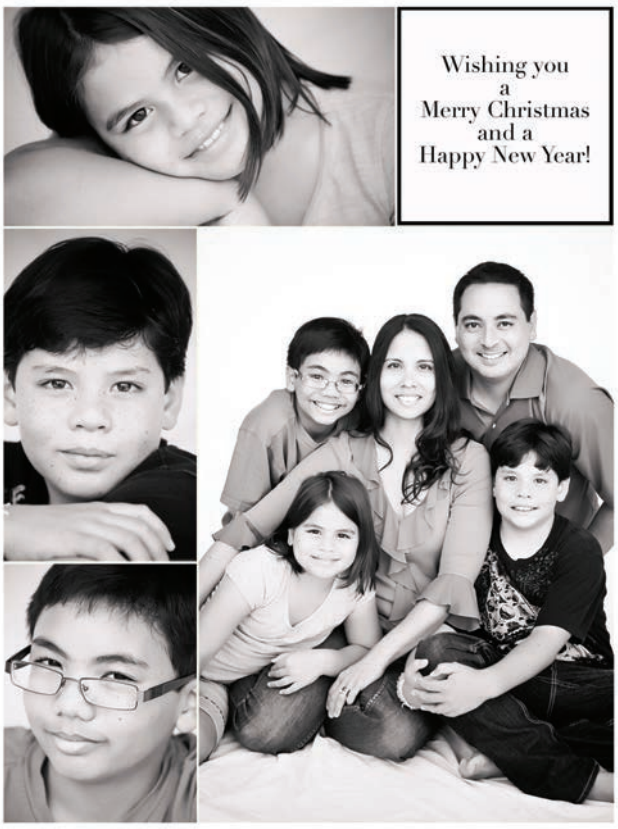
CREATING A BUSINESS PLAN

Once you've established the style of your business and the direction in which you want to take your business, writing a business plan comes next. There are several examples of how to write a business plan online, and an Internet search will yield some links to companies that you can purchase templates from. Before trying to write your business plan, gather the needed information. You will need to know the demographics of people in your area, including their income, spending percentages, and habits. For information on how to acquire this data, contact your local Chamber of Commerce, Better Business Bureau, or Score, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping small businesses.

LOGO AND LOOK

Once you've conceptualized your brand, you'll need to design a logo and web site. You'll also need to design marketing materials that fit the brand. Today there are several online companies that cater to photogra-

Don't put that camera away until the clients have left the location or studio. This adorable image was captured as the parents walked away from the session with their baby. The last-minute shot turned out to be one of their favorites.



Greeting cards are client pleasers, but they also put your work in the hands of other families who may be in the market for family portraits. The front of the card is shown on the left, and the back of the card is shown on the right. Be sure to include your web site address or other contact information on the card so that interested families can book a session with your studio.

pher's marketing products, logos, and web sites. Companies such as www.sugarlimedesign.com, www.designaglow.com, www.andiesmithdesigns.com, www.marathonpress.com, and others can design a coordinating, cohesive look and style for your logo, web site, and printed studio materials.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Not long ago, e-mail and e-mail blasts to prospective and existing clients were the only ways to use Internet marketing. Today, you need to have a profile for your business on Facebook and consistently connect with your clients. Some photographers have found using Twitter to be a good means for contacting their clients and attracting new clientele.

Using social media can help you grow your business. Once you create a public business profile, your first challenge is to connect with your existing clients on the specific site. You might consider offering to take a free shot of each client who connects with your business. You can upload the final images, with your imbedded logo, and tag their name once you have an established relationship on the social networking site. For specific details on how this is handled on the various networking sites, refer to the Internet or a book regarding the particular social media.

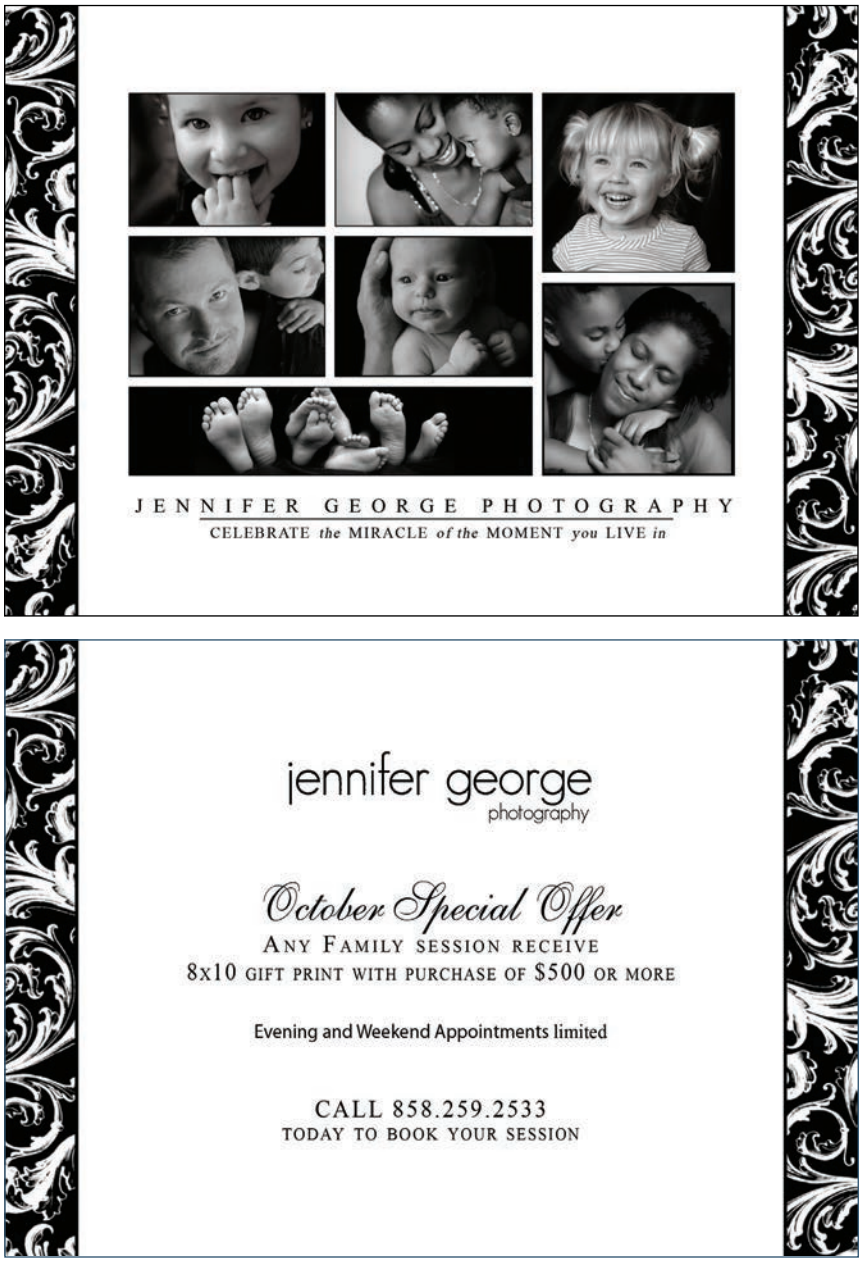
You can also use social media to build your business by offering your existing clients incentives to connect with your prospective clients. You

could offer a discount or free merchandise for encouraging X number of people to check out your business.

If you have a business profile on these sites, do not use it as you would a personal profile. Instead, create a separate personal profile—possibly using a nickname so that it is not associated with your business.

E-BLASTS

In the past, one of the best ways to reach your audience was to mail promotional postcards. Photographers could purchase mailing lists based upon zip codes, income, new babies, recent marriages, and just about any demographic you can think of. The problem with this method was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October Special Offer
ANY FAMILY SESSION RECEIVE
8x10 GIFT PRINT WITH PURCHASE OF $500 OR MORE
Evening and Weekend Appointments limited
CALL 858.259.2533
TODAY TO BOOK YOUR SESSION

This e-blast promotional piece was made by purchasing an inexpensive and easy-to-use downloadable template from www.jensfabulousstuff.com. I selected the images I wanted to use in the piece and inserted them into the "drag and drop" layout. The photographer's name and offer were changed, and the promotional piece was ready to be sent.

the expense involved: you had to pay to print the postcards or brochures, purchase the mailing lists, and then pay for postage.

Today, the e-blast has replaced the promotional postcard. In a matter of seconds, photographers can electronically send promotional pieces that contain the same design elements and offers. Collecting the e-mail addresses of clients is the hardest part! You can also post the e-blast card to your Facebook page for new potential clients to see.

WEB SITES AND BLOGS

Today the photographer's portfolio is no longer a binder with images inside to show to potential clients—it's their web site. For this reason, your web site should show only your best images.

When designing your site, choose only a few great images—and keep them current. You don't need to have a sample of every type of photography you offer on display. It is more important to show viewers what you do best and to sell your brand.

You can easily create a web site by purchasing and using a template from www.squarespace.com, www.photoshelter.com, www.creativemotiondesign.com, www.bigfolio.com, www.bludomain.com, and www.photobiz.com—or you can hire a professional web site designer. For custom sites, try www.ihousedesign.com, www.marathonpress.com, and www.spilledmilkdesigns.com.

Creating a blog will also allow you to reach out to potential clients and stay in touch with your existing customers. You can use your blog to share client photos and announce specials and studio events. Want to know how to use a blog? One of the best web sites for bloggers is www.problogger.net. It is full of how information about how and what to blog and offers tips for successful blogging. If you are new to blogging, try a free site like www.wordpress.com or www.blogger.com. If you find that it's working for you, consider upgrading to a custom site, or simply purchase a template through www.prophotoblogs.com or a similar company.

"I love that you captured each of my kids' personalities, beautiful smiles, and love for one another. Thank you for sharing your God-given talent through your photography."—*Lori H.*

PROMOTIONAL PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

In today's competitive and oversaturated market, the family portrait photographer has to find creative ways to generate business and attract new clients. By attending workshops on marketing, connecting with other photographers on social networking sites, "attending" webinars, and watching online demonstrations, you can add many new ideas to your marketing repertoire. Some tried-and-true promotional strategies are outlined below.

Long-Term Promotions. *Complimentary Sessions.* For over 20 years, Jeff and Kathleen Hawkins (www.jeffhawkins.com) have operated a successful wedding and portrait photography studio in Orlando, Florida.

They have developed a program to bring clients back over and over again. When their bridal couples purchase their Elite bridal package, they become members of the studio's Lifetime Portrait Program and will receive complimentary sessions at any point during their lifetime (e.g., this means that their baby and family portraits, anniversary sessions, etc., are all covered.) This type of program works well for portrait photographers and studios that make their profits in the products and prints they sell, and not from the session fees. It is a great idea for long-term, constant business.

"Our A Day in the Life session has become a family tradition that we look forward to each year."

—Mary Jo K.

Displays. For the high-end portrait photographer, displays at locations that cater to your clientele are a great investment. As Lori Nordstorm (www.nordstromphoto.com) states, "Displays completely built our business! Displays allow potential clients to experience your product. We work with our partner vendors and reward their favorite clients with portrait sessions and the chance to be part of the display art. This brings new clients into the studio that have been pre-qualified because of the businesses that we choose to partner with."

El Dorado Hills, California, photographers Dave and Ally McKay (www.McKayphotography.com) have long depended upon mall displays to generate business for their studio. The McKays invest in beautiful displays at indoor and outdoor shopping centers that cater to their target clientele. While it may be easier and less expensive to start a display in an area that is not targeted to your desired client demographic, it is a good idea to save the funds you need to create a display in a spot that will draw the client base you are after.

Getting to display your images is not as difficult as it may seem. Most businesses are more than willing to work with anyone or any other business that will enhance their current business or bring them more revenue. While the local high-end mall would be an obvious choice, keep in mind not only do you have to pay for an expensive display to be built and the images to be created, you will have the additional expense of paying a monthly rental fee to the center. Monthly rental fees for displays or small booths in shopping centers can run from $500 to $5000.

A less expensive yet effective marketing approach is to contact the owners of local restaurants, clothing stores, hair/beauty salons, and even yogurt or ice cream shops and work out a trade. Many small businesses are owned by families who could use your photography and, of course, you can get your images in front of the shops' customers. Try offering to trade a family portrait session for space for a wall display in their store for one year. Draw up a contract that spells out what you are trading for, specifying where the image or images are to be displayed, how long they are to be displayed, and who owns the images. Make sure to add that if the images are not displayed for the length of time agreed then a prorated invoice for your services will be sent to the store owner for payment.

Left—Another idea for a short-term promotion comes from Gail Patrice of Patrice Photography (www.gpatrice.smugmug.com). She markets a family portrait session special in August for all the families with returning college students. This has the added benefit of a short time line that the client has to respond to. **Right**—When printing your postcards, add promotional information. Place the cards everywhere you go, on community bulletin boards and displays. Also, consider using business cards. Many businesses do not have the counter space to display larger printed materials but will let you put out a stack of business cards. These smaller marketing pieces can be more subtly displayed in churches, at book clubs, and other such venues.

Short-Term Promotions. *The Neighborhood Portrait Plan.* Kay Eskridge (www.imagesbykay.com) came up with a plan to motivate existing clients without discounting her prices. She introduced the Neighborhood Portrait Plan, which she marketed to existing clients. Her studio offered four "mini" sessions to neighbors within a two-block radius and priced it at $100. With four families booked within a one-hour time frame, Kay's studio still makes the $400 per hour she normally would charge for a one family location session. Her clients love the promotion, as they can offer their neighbors a deal and get a discounted session too. For Kay, this means new clients and four sales opportunities instead of one.

The Promo Postcard. Today with the Internet, much of our traditional marketing methods no longer work the way they used to. But with a little twist, you can still utilize the standard postcard, brochure, and business card effectively.

Consider nixing the traditional targeted mailing to all of the addresses that appear on a purchased mailing list. Instead, try printing fewer copies of your materials and asking a local business to place them out for people to pick up. This way, you will save money on printing and postage, but will still reach the people who are interested in your services.

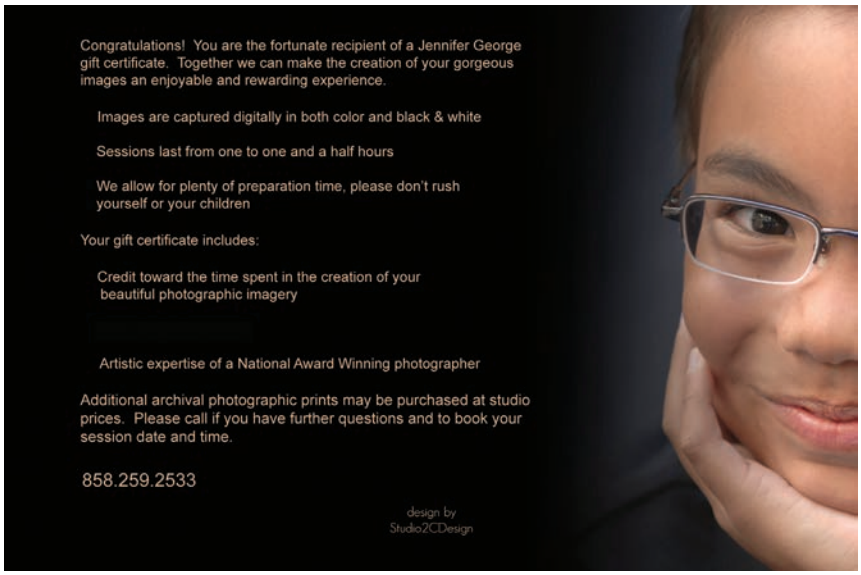
Partnership Promotions. An excellent way to draw more clients is to partner with another business and cross-promote the two businesses. Find a business that has a direct connection to yours (e.g., a children's clothing boutique) and look for places where families or moms gather where you can market your services. Consider family diners, furniture stores, hair and nail salons, etc. Try to get permission to host an event at their location. You can also consider pairing up with the other business and donate gift certificates for nonprofit fund-raisers.

The business that you choose to partner with should have a well-established database for reaching their clients and target demographic. This way, you can target both businesses' client base, sending them visu-

Making a Partnership Promotion Work

- Detail every aspect of the way the promotion will work. Write down every step and responsibility of each party involved. Include a time line for the entire project.
- Describe the benefits for the host of the promotion (e.g., increased customer loyalty or investing in community by promoting small businesses).
- What is the benefit for the customer?
- What is the benefit to your business?

Celebrate You!
A partnership between your retail store or spa business and our photography studio
jennifer george photography
858.259.2533


Congratulations! You are the fortunate recipient of a Jennifer George gift certificate. Together we can make the creation of your gorgeous images an enjoyable and rewarding experience.
Images are captured digitally in both color and black & white
Sessions last from one to one and a half hours
We allow for plenty of preparation time, please don't rush yourself or your children
Your gift certificate includes:
Credit toward the time spent in the creation of your beautiful photographic imagery
Artistic expertise of a National Award Winning photographer
Additional archival photographic prints may be purchased at studio prices. Please call if you have further questions and to book your session date and time.
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design by Studio2CDesign

Top—This dynamic promo postcard is used when we approach businesses about partnering with our studio. **Bottom**—Consider donating a gift certificate to your studio to a nonprofit organization to help support their fund-raising effort. In doing so, you will not only be supporting a worthy cause; you will also be spreading the word about your business.

ally pleasing promotional pieces that demonstrate your partnership and provide important details about the promotion. *(Note:* It is important to assure any business that you partner with that the contact information they supply for their clients will not be used for any other promotion or given to any other person or business.)

Postcards (top) and business card-sized pieces (bottom) like these can be easily displayed at the front desk or cashier's station of local business offices or shops. When designing these pieces, it's important to use minimal text and strong images—ones that send a strong message about your style of photography—to entice viewers to pick up the card and act on your special promotion.

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LEARN HOW NATURAL LIGHT CAN HELP YOU DESIGN MORE FLATTERING AND APPEALING FAMILY PORTRAITS

Family portraiture is a genre in which photographers can benefit greatly from using natural light—but it is also the genre in which using natural light presents the most complex obstacles to success. In this book, Jennifer George shows you how to rise to the challenge—and reap the benefits!

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PO Box 586, Buffalo, NY 14226
www.AmherstMedia.com
ISBN-13: 978-1608952861
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FEATURES:

- How using natural light and fun locations creates a better experience for your subjects—and more profits for you
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- Working with subjects of all ages—from infants and toddlers to teens and adults
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- Marketing your natural-light family portraits
- Designing A Day in the Life albums and family albums